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THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE

THE INSTITUTE is rooted in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) who stressed, among other things, the equal validity of all religions, the potential divinity of man, and service to man as a way of worshipping God. Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), carried far and wide these teachings which, really speaking, constitute the core of India's oldest philosophy, Vedanta. Later, in 1897, he founded, in order to propagate these ideas, a non-proselytizing religious organization, the Ramakrishna Mission, which, besides teaching Vedanta, gives concrete service to the community by running schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, etc. Besides the headquarters, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission had 195 branches in India and abroad in March 2008.

PURPOSE

ONE SUCH branch is the Institute started in 1938 as an offshoot of Sri Ramakrishna's first birth-centenary celebrations held in 1936-1937. With humble beginnings in a small rented room in north Calcutta, the Institute has grown over the years, and the fact that it now occupies its present magnificent building (completed in 1960) in south Calcutta is a testimony to its popularity.

While culture is the Institute's specific field of study, it is not national culture alone that it studies, but that culture which is the common heritage of all mankind and to which every race and religion has made its own contributions. Such a study, the Institute believes, will provide the necessary psychological background to the cementing process which technology has initiated between the races of mankind.

ACTIVITIES

Cultural Programmes

Throughout the year the Institute has a busy schedule of lectures, debates, elocution competitions, seminars, symposia, study circles, and scripture classes, and religious congregations, through which knowledge, both modern and ancient, is imparted to the public. Devotional songs constitute regular features of the Institute's activities all round the year.

Vivekananda Study for the Youth

To encourage young people to imbibe the ideals of the Ramakrishna Mission and study Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature, the Institute started late in the seventies a youth forum called Vivekananda Study Circle and, later on, another youth wing called Vivekananda Anushilan with the young boys and girls in the age group of 14 to 30. Generally, in fortnightly meetings every month, members discuss various topics on the life, teachings and philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, interact with question-answer and are guided and trained how to meditate.

School of Languages

Since language is a barrier to understanding others, the Institute regards the teaching of languages as an integral part of its work in the field of intercultural exchange. The Institute's SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES, with over 7,000 students on the roll, teaches 17 languages : Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Sanskrit, Spanish,Tamil, and Urdu.

International House

Attached to the Institute there is an INTERNATIONAL HOUSE meant for the Institute's guests and for those scholars and students who come from different parts of India as well as from abroad at the invitation of the Institute or of universities and other learned societies for study and research or simply for exchange of ideas with Indian scholars. This bringing together of scholars of different nationalities helps create a bridge that unites minds and spirits having different backgrounds.

Library

To assist scholars in their work of study and research, there is at the Institute a GENERAL LIBRARY, with a reading room attached. The Library specializes in the

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Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture

Editor
SWAMI SARVABHUTANANDA
Associate Editor
SWARAJ MAZUMDAR

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God is Everywhere

Without diluting the spirit of the scriptures, many spiritual teachers convey their message through stories, anecdotes and dialogues. These are easily understood by common people because of the simple language and style, free from abstruse references and subtleties. The stories, shorn of superfluous details, never turn out to be boring catechism, nor do they deteriorate into intellectual fencing and logic chopping.

We will go through two stories taken from occidental and oriental sources that reveal the eternal Truth. The stories give us a call to rise above the mundane level and come to the world of spirituality. The spiritual storytellers are the messengers of the Supreme Being and speak from experience of a living consciousness of the oneness of the all-pervading spirit.

The first story goes like this: Once Goswami Tulsidas was coming home at dead of night when he met some thieves who asked him, 'Who are you?' Tulsidas was filled with the serene feeling of same-sightedness. So he said politely, 'Brothers! I am no other than you people.' The thieves who were out to commit a burglary, did not understand the inner meaning but took his words literally and thought that he was another thief, maybe a novice one. So they asked him to join them. But before breaking into a house, they asked Tulsidas to stand outside and keep a watch if someone would come. They told him to alert them to any unforeseen danger. Giving Tulsidas this instruction, they entered the house. No sooner they were in, Tulsidas took out a conch-shell from his bundle and started blowing it. Hearing the sound the thieves came out hurriedly and found Tulsidas blowing it. They dragged him away and asked angrily, 'Why have you blown the conch-shell?' Tulsidas said naively, 'You people told me to signal you if someone is seen nearby. I looked around and found Lord Rāma everywhere. Theft is not only a crime, but a sin for which the Lord may punish you. So, to save you from the Lord's wrath, I tried to make you alert.' 'But where did you see Lord Rāma? He is nowhere!', said one of them. Tulsidas said, 'Lord Rāma is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient and I find Him everywhere!' The words of Tulsidas changed the die-hard thieves who realized the eternal Truth and became changed men. They took refuge in Lord Rāma.

Now, the other story from the West: There was an atheist who had worldly wisdom. He had two small children and a God-fearing wife. He used to think that the concept of God is a sheer figment of stupid minds. He wanted to establish his views before the clergies, philosophers and scholars. So he arranged for a dialogue at his own place where he thought he would give his deliberation regarding the non-existence of God.

He asked his children to decorate the drawing room and to put up a display-board with the message: 'GOD IS NOWHERE'. The children did accordingly. The display-board was covered with a veil. When the audience came in, the first thing the atheist did was to unveil the board. To everybody's wonder, the message on the board was: 'GOD IS NOW HERE.' The letter 'w' from 'where' was joined with the previous word 'no' and turned to be 'now'. The mother of the innocent children realized that God Himself declared His presence through the error in writing. It had a tremendous impact on the atheist too, who realized that the Omniscient God taught him the spiritual lesson through his children.

It is true that spiritual insights come from the purity of the soul who realizes that God is manifest in everything. Every religion declares that our journey should be from darkness to Light, the Light that illumines all, irrespective of time and space. ■

Sri Ramakrishna and the Spiritual Heritage of India

SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

India has an extremely rich spiritual heritage or tradition. Under this tradition comes the idea which is described in the *Gitā* in the following *shlokas*:

Yadā yadā hi dharmasya
glānirbhavati bhārata /
Abhyutthānam adharmasya
tadātmānam srijāmyaham. (4.7)
Paritrānāya sādhunām
vināshāya ca dushkritām /
Dharmasamsthāpanārthāya
sambhavāmi yuge yuge. (4.8)

Here Sri Krishna, the Supreme Reality, affirms that as God He comes down on Earth in age after age for the re-establishment of *dharma* or righteousness, as well as for the destruction of the wicked. On that note Sri Ramakrishna has been widely acknowledged as an *Avatāra*, ie God descending on Earth.

Indian spiritual heritage is vast and wonderful. It has shown the world innumerable paths or approaches to reach the ultimate goal of life which can by and large be classified as Dvaita, Vishishtādvaita, Advaita, Yoga, Tantra, etc. Now, whether Sri Ramakrishna or the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement has made any significant contribution to the already existing rich heritage of spiritual tradition and culture of the country is the subject to be discussed.

All the different schools of philosophy speak of the ultimate goal of life, the difference being only in the methodologies advocated by them. Sri Ramakrishna had made a significant contribution in this direction, because probably for the first time he emphasized that religion is realization. The emphasis on *anubhava* is something very unique to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition, particularly if you examine from the viewpoint of traditional Advaita.

The concept of *anubhava*

Advaita speaks of the ultimate goal of life as attainment of knowledge, ie removal of *ajnāna* or ignorance. The Shankara tradition clearly emphasizes that the proper understanding of the *Shrutis* leads to the removal of ignorance. Virtually there is no concept of *anubhava* among the traditional schools irrevocably loyal to Shankara. But Sri Ramakrishna and, following him, Swami Vivekananda, Holy Mother, all the direct disciples of the Master and those following them, have very clearly said that it is not absolutely necessary to understand the *Shrutis* in the proper manner; the goal of life is realization. Religion is realization. Nothing short of that can give us absolutely unambiguous, doubtless knowledge. True perception, or true understanding is possible only through experience.

Then again, while all the three schools mentioned earlier, namely Dvaita, Vishishtādvaita and Advaita, claim supremacy over the other, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition reveals that they are

stages of spiritual evolution. They are not contradictory or in conflict with each other. This is another uniqueness of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition.

The Vedas, considered as the repositories of all Indian religious traditions, speak of two approaches to the realization of the ultimate goal. One is *pravritti mārga* or the path of outward action. And the other is *nivritti mārga* or the path of contemplation or internalization. The two were never considered superior or inferior paths. Both were considered equally valid paths or approaches to the ultimate Reality depending upon the needs and temperaments of the aspirants, because in our tradition, the goal of life has been very clearly defined. Our entire life was based on the concept of *dharma* or righteousness. It was a way of life. The four objectives of life or *purushārthas* were clearly defined as *dharma, artha, kāma* and *moksha* which are attainable and desirable. However, *dharma* is the foundation, the starting-point. Even to attain *artha* and *kāma* one has to start with *dharma*. Thus the whole Indian society was rooted in the idea of *dharma* as supremely wonderful way of guiding one's approach to life itself.

Pravritti and *nivritti*

The *pravritti mārga* was for those who were not prepared for strenuous spiritual practices, who wanted to go through the relatively easier path, taking a breath on the way. They would proceed on the line of *dharma, artha, kāma* and ultimately try to attain *moksha* or liberation. The other group, extremely few in number, would take the *nivritti* path without going through *artha* and *kāma* and directly strive to attain *moksha* through the path of inwardness or meditation. As the ultimate goal of life was the same for both the groups, there was no question of considering one path inferior and the other superior.

Over a period of time this distinction got distorted totally because of many influences, including the Western one when people got more inclined towards the idea of *bhoga* or material enjoyment. People living a life of indulgence naturally leads to *adharma* or unrighteousness which necessitates the coming of an *Avatāra*. In other words, the *pravritti mārga* people distanced themselves from *dharma* in course of time and forgot the ultimate goal of life. They equated *pravritti* with the life of indulgence. So the distinction between these two classes of people became pronounced. The *nivritti mārgis* gave up everything and plunged headlong in the pursuit of *moksha,* while the *pravritti mārgis* threw themselves in the pool of enjoyment.

It is again a contribution of Sri Ramakrishna who virtually erased the rigid dividing line between *pravritti* and *nivritti*. He said it is possible for everyone to reach the ultimate goal by following the path according to one's mental development or temperament. A large number of household devotees visited him regularly and to them all he clearly said how they are to live in the world like a mud-fish or a lotus-leaf and so on. Thus Sri Ramakrishna instilled into the *pravritti-mārgis* a sense of value and credibility.

Sister Nivedita in her Introduction to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* writes:

> If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have

and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

So Sri Thakur taught that the ultimate goal of life is God-realization. This has been declared also by the earlier *Avatāras* and *achāryas* of earlier ages. But it is Sri Ramakrishna who says emphatically that the ultimate goal of life is God-realization and nothing else. Whether it is through *pravritti* or *nivritti*, the goal is God-realization alone. Again, Sri Ramakrishna's emphasis on *anubhava* is not theoretical. Whatever he himself practised or whatever he experienced, that he gave to people in the form of some advice and parables.

The concept of *vijnāna*

We all know that Sri Ramakrishna did all kinds of *sādhanā* prevailing not only in our traditions, but also common in the traditions of other religions. So after *Advaita sādhanā*, when he reached the highest non-dual knowledge, he did not stop there. He went further, to a state called *vijnāna*. *Vijnāna* is the special knowledge of the Absolute, by which one affirms the universe and sees it as the manifestation of Brahman. So he said, first you hold on to the negative process of discrimination by stating '*neti*', '*neti*', ('not this, not this') till you reach the highest non-dual knowledge. Then, when you reach the highest knowledge, another awareness dawns upon you and you assert that everything is the manifestation of the same Brahman. That is '*iti*', '*iti*' ('verily this, verily this'). First negation. Then affirmation. Sri Ramakrishna gave a very beautiful example to illustrate this process. He said, you use a staircase to go to the terrace. Till you reach the terrace you go on negating, saying: 'This is not the terrace', 'this is not the terrace'. But once you reach the terrace the knowledge dawns upon you that terrace is made up of the same material as the staircase. Both are made of same brick and mortar, etc. What Thakur did was that he did not subscribe to the idea that the world is illusory or *māyā* which is one of the strong fundamental concepts of Advaita Vedanta. This again is Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful addition to the Indian spiritual tradition and culture.

Sri Ramakrishna said, you need not negate the world as *māyā*. Harinath Chattopadhyay, one of his future monastic disciples, was a great student of Vedanta. He asked Harinath when he met him in Calcutta: Hari, I hear you are studying Vedanta very much. But what does your Vedanta say? Does it not say that '*Brahma satya, jagat mithyā*'? But even the *vicāra* (discrimination) that you do that the world is illusory is done with the help of things that are available around you!

Sri Thakur gave another example. He said when Sri Rāmachandra refused to be coronated, Dasharatha became worried. He sent him to Vashishtha, the great sage, who asked Rāma to argue with him. Vashishtha said: Is the world apart from God? Is God not there in the world? If God is not there in the world, you need not accept the throne. Sri Rāmachandra had to agree.

Negation not emphasized

You see, Sri Ramakrishna's emphasis was not on negation of the world merely as *māyā*. He saw that consciousness is permeating the whole universe. Even when you say 'permeating', then you are talking of two entities, as if something is there and that is filled with something else. Rather Sri Ramakrishna says, there is only Consciousness or *Chaitanya*. At one stage of his life he could not therefore even walk on the grass. You also know the incident when he saw two boatmen fighting and one hitting the other hard on the back. Sri Thakur's

face immediately twisted in pain as if he had been beaten. Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, saw on Thakur's back a clear mark of bruise. How could this happen? Because of his extraordinary Advaitic realization he had become one with the Universal Consciousness. So Sri Ramakrishna has asked us not to negate the world but to consider it as the manifestation of the Lord Himself. It is only the divine *lilā* or God's manifestations in so many forms. So this is another wonderful world view that Sri Ramakrishna has given. Otherwise, if you are to negate the world completely as *māyā*, then your *sādhanā* is also within the realm of *māyā*. Then your spiritual practice also becomes irrelevant. So it is Sri Ramakrishna's contribution that everything is positive. The world is pervaded by God or Consciousness. It is nothing but the manifestation of God's own power and with that idea all become meaningful including your *sādhanā*. Only in that sense you could bring the *pravritti* and *nivritti mārgis* together, because everyone is struggling in his own way, each according to the path convenient to him, and both approaching the same ultimate goal which is *moksha*.

Validity of all approaches

There is another idea which again is unique. Our scriptures say '*ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*'—'Truth is one, the sages call It variously'. This gives us an idea of the validity of all approaches, all paths. This statement seems to have great relevance to intra-religious ideas. But it has also got meaning in the domain of inter-religious ideas. Sri Ramakrishna gave an extensive meaning to it by extending its horizon to include the whole gamut of religious practises available to mankind. Through his own spiritual practises, he demonstrated clearly that all are equally valid paths or approaches to the ultimate goal, be it Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism or Jainism. Hence he said '*yato mat tato path*'. This again is linked with the first idea, the idea of *anubhava*. He was not stating merely about the desirability of harmony of religious practices but he himself had practised all the religions. And by virtue of his own *anubhava* he had realized that all paths lead to the same ultimate Truth.

Another unique contribution of Sri Ramakrishna is the idea of service. Our scriptures have reminded us all through about our obligations to the elders, to society, to guru, parents, wife and children, to animals, to plant life or biota and to many others. But, for the first time, it was Sri Ramakrishna who really gave us a new vision that 'service' gives a larger dimension to our spiritual evolution. He gave the idea of *Shiva jnāne jiva sevā* when he was hearing a discourse on the Vaishnava tenets of *nāme ruchi, jive dayā* etc. He immediately said that we, being too insignificant, cannot show compassion to anybody. It is only service that we can render. He said, look upon everyone as God and then serve them.

Service also leads to liberation

If you read Shankara's Advaita you will find he has given work an inferior position. Shankara clearly says, work consisting of rites and rituals would at best lead you to *chittashuddhi* or purification of mind. Then you have to have recourse to *jnāna-nishthā* and then following that you will get ultimate knowledge. But it fell upon Sri Ramakrishna to show that service also leads to liberation. Because of his enlightened world view he did not negate the world as illusory or *māyā*. If the world is entirely illusory, work too is illusory. Obviously then 'work' will not have the potency to liberate you. But when you accept the world as the

manifestation of God and serve anyone thinking that you are serving verily the Lord Himself, it becomes a very powerful mode of spiritual practice. The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission are deeply rooted in this idea. That is why Swamiji has given the Ramakrishna Order the twin motto—*ātmamoksha* and *jagat hita*—one's own liberation and service to humanity. Swamiji was emphatic that all the four yogas—*karma, bhakti, jnāna* and *yoga*—are equally capable of liberating us from the snares of bondage. But he also says at the same time that no yoga is independent of the other yogas. You know how the world is going now. How can you negate work in this age? The principal idea here is how can we convert this work into a higher form of spiritual practice so that we get elevated spiritually. So Swamiji time and again spoke on *Karma-yoga*—or work, as a *yoga*. Shankara was clear that work would bring attachment or bondage. So Swami Vivekananda said that we have to work with a detached mind as the *Bhagavad Gitā* also commands us to do. The *Gitā* says clearly, '*Karmanyevādhikāraste mā phaleshu kadācana; Mā karmaphalaheturbhuh mā te sango'stvakarmani*' (2.47). That is to say, 'your right is to work only; but never to its fruits. May you not be motivated by the fruits of actions; nor let your attachment be towards inaction.'

Why do we ask for fruits? Because we desire the fruits. This desire brings attachment. If we can do away with this desire, we can convert our work into a method of *sādhanā* for spiritual evolution. Following in the footprints of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, many orthodox organizations have now started serving the people. So this is another contribution of Sri Ramakrishna.

Even in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission many a monk vacillates between these two ideas—giving up all activities and sitting in meditation in a Shiva-like posture which is very fascinating. Work such as serving the patient, running from ward to ward, providing food, distributing relief and doing all other menial and mundane activities are not all that attractive. Even then, work done in the spirit of *yoga* does lead one to a higher spiritual plane. This can be well illustrated by the example of Vanabihari Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Shivananda.

The example of Vanabihari Maharaj

One day Swami Shivananda said to him: 'Go to Benares and serve the people'. And with that mandate he went to Kashi Sevashrama. The Sevashrama in those days was poor. It was not a sophisticated hospital as it is now. So when he went there he was given a very small room and a very humble assignment. But Vanabihari Maharaj converted his apparently ordinary work into a *sādhanā*. Everyday when the 'Outdoor' section of the hospital would open in the morning, he would be present without fail. He continued this mission probably for the next five decades. From morning till late noon, he would serve the patients and dress their wounds. He would be standing and doing his job for the next seven to eight hours till 2.30 or 3 pm. Then he would have some food which would be very cold in the winters and sometimes stale also. This hard work caused severe arthritis. His knees were badly affected and feet became swollen. But this did not deter him from maintaining his routine. He would somehow drag himself and be there at the 'Outdoor' when it opened in the morning. His dedicated service came to be known to all. Many people would just come to him with the faith that one healing touch from the swami would cure their disease. And this

literally would happen. Even people suffering from gangrene with no hope of recovery came to him for his touch. The people of Benares started calling him '*Chalamān Vishvanāth*' or moving Shiva who happens to be the presiding deity of Kashi. Later, when he could no longer walk, he used the wheelchair to come to his duty. This he continued until he got bedridden.

I have met him twice. His face was serene and glowed with spiritual radiance. A soft benign smile lit up his profile. His face bore no trace of discontentment or agony because of his physical pain and disability. It was indeed impossible not to be impressed by the glow of his face.

So there are many such extraordinary and wonderful examples of selfless service in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition. They had reached extraordinary spiritual heights through the path of service or *sevā*. This is a unique contribution of the Ramakrishna tradition.

Highest status given to women

We have heard of Gārgi and Maitreyi of ancient India. They were *brahmavādinis*. They were given the highest status in society. There were many such women of highest achievement. But in course of time women lost their high position. They were denied access to the scriptures, the Vedas and other holy books. They were subjugated, exploited and neglected. For centuries this deplorable condition prevailed. But again, it was Sri Ramakrishna who raised them. Sri Ramakrishna said, women were the embodiments of the Divine Mother; hence they must be honoured. Women are equally entitled to attain spiritual heights. And he himself showed this by offering the fruits of his *sādhanā* at the feet of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, his consort, whom he worshipped as Goddess Shodashi. He said, Sarada Devi is Goddess Saraswati. She is here on this Earth to exemplify the spiritual ideals. She is the Divine Mother—the Mother of all. And truly Holy Mother embraced all who came to her.

Sri Ramakrishna also showed that women could do much more than what men can. He categorically told Sarada Devi that she has to do much more than what he has done. He said: 'Do I have to do everything? Will you not do anything? You have to do much more than what I have done.' He left Sarada Devi behind to take up the mantle. And how she took it up is now a part of history. She became the '*Sangha Janani*'.

Sri Ramakrishna gave her spiritual instructions when she was at Dakshineswar. By his own behaviour or attitude he set an example of how women should be honoured.

Swami Vivekananda too said that women should be given freedom to take their own decision, to shape their lives as they wish. Even women have the right to lead a life of celibacy if they like, Swamiji unequivocally asserted. And with that idea the Sarada Math, a monastery for nuns, has come up. In our Hindu tradition men embracing monastic life was common. But for women there was no such thing. So again, it was Sri Ramakrishna who gave women the highest position of honour in society. ■

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* Swami Shantatmananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order attached to the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi. This article is the edited version of his lecture delivered at the Institute on 18 May 2010.

Sri Ramakrishna and Rāmlālā

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna often used to say that people in this Kali-yuga were '*annagata-prāna*' (having their whole life in food, ie, pleasures of the body) and hence *bhakti* or devotion as taught by the great sages like Nārada was the most suitable and the easiest of spiritual disciplines for them. Though we find that the elements of *bhakti* are found even in the *Rigveda*, it is in the epics (including the *Bhāgavad Gitā*) and in the puranas (especially the *Vishnu* and *Bhāgavata* puranas) that *bhakti* finds its fullest development and expression.

There are several classifications of *bhakti*. But the one based on our moods and feelings is easier to understand and practise. Hanuman and Garuda practised the devotedness of the servant towards their master (*Dāsyabhāva*). Arjuna and Uddhava looked upon the Lord as their friend (*Sakhyabhāva*). Kaushalyā and Yashodā delighted themselves by fondling the Lord as their son. The Gopis of Vrindavan loved the Lord dearly as their sweetheart (*Madhurabhāva*). But for the ordinary run of mankind, it is easier to cultivate the feeling that one is a servant of the Lord and a child of the Divine Mother (*Vātsalyabhāva* in the reverse).

After the Epic and the Pauranic age, perhaps, we find the *Vātsalya bhakti* of the Kaushalyā-Yashodā-type for the first time manifesting through Jatadhari, Sri Ramakrishna and Aghoramani Devi. The accounts of each of them are as thrilling as they are inspiring.

Maybe, it is easier for a woman to perform this type of *sādhanā* by her very nature as a mother. However, since no one is a man or a woman in the absolute sense of the term and each is a blend of the qualities of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, it should not be very difficult for anyone—man or woman—to practise this type of *sādhanā*. Moreover, the *Saptasati* declares that the Divine Mother is present in all beings as the mother instinct (*yā devi sarvabhuteshu mātrirupena samsthitā*).

The utility, beauty and sublimity of this *sādhanā* has been forcefully brought out by Claude Alan Stark in his remarkable book '*GOD of All*' thus:

> This type of mood is rare in mystical history compared with other types—because in it the Lord is regarded as completely dependant on the devotee, which is an inversion of the more common attitudes. Here, God as the Divine Child looks to the devotee for the fulfilment of his daily needs and wants, much as a child to a parent in real-life circumstances. God, of course, has no needs; it is man who is burdened with count-less requirements which he petitions God to fulfil, including the primordial need for salvation itself. This very fact highlights the unique advantage of *Vātsalya bhāva*: by focussing his emotional life on the daily needs of God as Child, the spiritual aspirant tends to forget his own wants, and eventually develops selfless love for God. This selfless love ripens into complete self-forgetfulness in the thought of God alone, into *prema*, which is the acme and perfection of the devotional life. (p. 94)

Since love is unmercenary or selfless, the lover has to totally give himself up for the sake of the beloved. Nārada describes it thus: 'Bhakti consists in offering all activities to God and feeling supremely restless and miserable at the slightest lapse in remembrance of God' (*Nāradiya Bhakti-Sutra* 19). This total self-forgetfulness is possible as much in *Vātsalyabhāva* as in the *Madhurabhāva* of the Gopis of Vrindavan, as shown by the examples of the three great souls mentioned earlier. A perusal of the description of such a love of mother Kaushalyā for her child Sri Rāma as given by that immortal poet-mystic Tulsidās (*Rāmacharitmānas* D. 200-202, C. 199-200) will prove this point for us:

> Thus the Lord played his childish tricks and delighted all who dwelt in the city. At one time Kaushalyā would dandle him on her knees, and at another would lay him in the cradle and rock him. (D. 200) Lost in love Kaushalyā noticed not the passing of day and night; utterly possessed by love for her son, his mothers sang of his childish acts. (C. 199) One day his mother bathed and dressed him and put him to sleep in his cradle. Then she too bathed, preparing to worship the Blessed Lord, the patron deity of her house. When his mother had worshipped and offered her oblation, she went to the place where she had prepared the sacrificial meal, and when she returned to the place of worship, she saw her son eating the oblation. His mother ran off alarmed to her babe and saw him sleeping there as before. She came back and saw her son again. Her heart beat fast and she was all unstrung. She saw two boys, one here, one there: She thought, 'Is my mind all astray, or is there some other explanation?'
>
> When Rāma saw his mother so perplexed, the Lord smiled sweetly and laughed. (D. 201) He displayed to his mother his own wondrous form, indivisible. A myriad universe she beheld set on every hair; numberless suns and moons. Shivas and Brahmās, (C. 200) many a mountain and river, sea, land and wood; time, destiny, the three constituents, knowledge and nature—all that she had ever heard of. When she beheld the mystic vision, she stood in dire alarm with folded hands. She saw the soul that illusion makes to dance; she saw the faith that sets it free. She felt a thrill of awe; no words came from her lips. She closed her eyes and bowed her head before his feet. Seeing his mother lost in amazement, Kharāri [another name of Rāma who killed Khara, the demon] once again became a child; but she could not sing his praises for very fear. She thought, 'I held the Father of the world to be my son.' Earnestly Hari warned his mother, 'Hear me, mother! Nowhere repeat what you have seen!' (D. 202) Again and again Kaushalya humbly besought him with folded hands, 'Never again, O Lord, may Thy magic power affect me with its influence!'

After successfully completing the Tāntrik *sādhanās* under the able guidance of the Bhairavi Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna now turned towards the practice of various *sādhanās* of *bhakti*. The first to be chosen was the *Vātsalyabhāva*.

Jatadhari arrives at Dakshineswar

It was perhaps in the year 1864 that the wandering monk Jatadhari arrived at Dakshineswar carrying the image of Rāmlālā (Child Rāma). Years of loving and devoted *sādhanā* to child Rāma, as mother Kaushalyā Devi, had bestowed upon this Vaishnava sadhu, the constant and continuous vision of Shri Rāma in and through that metallic image. It was no more an image but a living presence for him. He fed the child Rāma, nursed him, played with him and even put him to bed at night. In this

devoted service he completely forgot himself. In the company of that image he was beside himself with bliss and always inebriated with that.

Very soon Sri Ramakrishna became intimate with Jatadhari who could not hide his experiences. Sri Ramakrishna started spending long hours in his company watching him intently. In no time Rāmlālā became attached to Sri Ramakrishna often preferring him to Jatadhari himself! The story of their sweet intimacy is better repeated in his own words:

> That Baba was serving the image for a long time. He took it with him wherever he went. He cooked whatever he got by Bhiksha and offered the cooked food to it. That was not all; he actually saw that Rāmlālā ate, or wished to eat something, or wanted to go for a walk, or insisted on the satisfaction of a fancy, and so on. In the company of the image he was beside himself with bliss and always remained 'inebriated'. I also saw Rāmlālā doing all that. I sat all the twenty-four hours of the day with the Baba, and kept gazing on Rāmlālā.
>
> As days passed on, Rāmlālā's love for me went on increasing. As long as I remained with the Baba, Rāmlālā felt happy—he played and sported; but as soon as I came away from that place to my room, he also followed me immediately there. He did not remain with the Sadhu, although I forbade him to come. I at first thought it was perhaps a fancy of mine. How could it be otherwise? Could Rāmlālā (in the image) love me more than the Baba who had been loving and serving him tenderly all these years? Impossible! But of what avail were these thoughts? I actually saw—just as I see you before me—that Rāmlālā accompanied me dancing, now preceding, now following me. Sometimes he importuned me to carry him in my arms. Again, when I took him on my lap, he would by no means remain there. He would go down to run hither and thither, collect flowers in thorny jungles, or go to the Ganga to swim and splash water there. I said over and over again, 'My child, don't do that, you will get blisters on your soles if you run in the sun. Do not remain in water so long, you will catch cold and get fever.' But he would not listen, however much I might forbid him. Unconcerned, he would go on with his pranks, as if I were speaking to someone else. He would sometimes grin and look at me with his two eyes, beautiful like the petals of a lotus, or carry on his pranks with a vengeance. He would pout both his lips and grimace and make faces at me. I would then actually be angry and scold him, 'You rascal, wait, I will give you a sound beating today.' Saying so, I would pull him away from the sun or from the water, cajoling him by giving this thing or that, and then ask him to play within the room. Again, finding it impossible to restrain his pranks, I would sometimes give him a slap or two. Thus beaten, he would pout his beautiful lips, and sob and look at me with tears in his eyes. I would feel terribly pained to see him cry. I would then take him affectionately on my lap and humour him. I actually saw and did all this.
>
> One day I was going to bathe, when he took an obstinate fancy to go with me. What could I do? I took him with me. Then he would not come out of the water. He turned a deaf ear to all my pleadings. At last I became angry, immersed him in the water and said, 'Be now in the water as long as you like'; and I actually saw that he panted and writhed under the water. Startled to see his suffering, I exclaimed within myself remorsefully 'What have I done!' I took him out of the water on to my lap.
>
> I cannot describe what agony I felt for him on another occasion, and how much I wept. That day Rāmlālā was obstinately demanding something to eat, and I gave him some parched rice not properly husked, in order to pacify him. I then found that his soft and

delicate tongue got lacerated by the husk while he was eating. Dear me! What a great pain I felt then! I took him on my lap, wept loudly, and taking hold of his chin, sobbed out the words, 'Oh, how rash and stupid I have been! To have put this contemptible stuff into the mouth which mother Kaushalyā used to fill lovingly with such soft delicacies as butter, thickened milk and cream!'

As he was speaking these words, the Master's past grief burst forth anew. He became restless in our presence and wept so bitterly that we could not restrain our sympathetic tears, though we did not understand a bit of his loving relationship with Rāmlālā. (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* by Swami Saradananda: trans. Swami Jagadananda, Vol. II, pp. 605-7)

Describing the wonderful behaviour of Rāmlālā, Sri Ramakrishna said:

In the course of his description of that wonderful behaviour of Rāmlālā, the Master said, 'On some days the holy Baba would cook food and offer it to Rāmlālā but could not find him. Wounded at heart, he would then run up here (to the Master's room) and find playing in the room. With a feeling of wounded love, he would then scold him, saying, 'I took so much trouble to cook food for you and am searching for you here and there, but without the least consideration for all that, you are lingering here. Ah! that has ever been your way. You have no kindness or affection. You left behind your father and went to the forest; and though your poor father died weeping for you, you never returned to show yourself to him.' With these and similar words, he used to drag Rāmlālā to his place and feed him. Time passed in that way. The Sadhu remained here for a long time; for Rāmlālā did not like to leave this place (ie, me). The Baba came to me and said, 'Rāmlālā has shown himself to me in the way I wanted to have his vision and has thus fulfilled my life's aspiration. Moreover, he said he would not go from here; for he does not like to leave you behind and go elsewhere. My mind is, however, free from sorrow and pain, as I find that Rāmlālā lives happily with you, playing and sporting all the livelong day. I feel beside myself with bliss to see it. I am now in such a state that I feel happy at his happiness. Therefore, I can now leave him with you and go elsewhere. Knowing that he is happy with you. I too shall feel happy.' So saying, he gave Rāmlālā to me, and departed. Rāmlālā has been here since then. (*Great Master*, pp. 611-12)

The Upanishads describe God as the very personification of bliss and love. The *Bhāgavata* religion through its famous works like the *Gitā*, the *Vishnupurāna* and the *Bhāgavata* underscores and eulogizes love for God as the most powerful weapon in the hands of man to 'capture' Him. As the creator, ruler and destroyer of this universe, God may be a stern father or a 'heartless' judge. That may be the view of philosophy. But, for religion, as preached and practised by numberless mystics, seers and godmen, He is neither an eternally receding abstract entity, nor a hard taskmaster or a heartless judge. He is the nearest and dearest of all, always willing to respond abundantly even though our approaches may be very imperfect.

Through the Rāmlālā episode Sri Ramakrishna has shown to the world how even ordinary instincts like the love of the mother for the offspring can be converted into modes of *sādhanā* lifting the sādhaka to extraordinary spiritual heights. ■

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* Swami Harshananda is the Adhyaksha of Ramakrishna Math, Basavanagudi, Bangalore.

Death, Killing and Self-killing

PRADYOT KUMAR MUKHOPADHYAY

Death is the phenomenon which is of common experience of all people of all cultures and traditions. But nowhere except Jainism such a detailed discussion on death is found. The speciality of Jainism is that not only it has an enormous literature on the subject of death, but the minuteness of the discussions and their thoroughness are also mind-boggling. Another characteristic feature of Jainism is the notion of voluntary death which is widely practised by the Jains. In no other traditions self-killing is practised to such an extent as in Jainism.

In the Jaina tradition there are at least eight to nine synonymous expressions to designate one single phenomenon called self-killing. Similarly, seventeen different types of self-killings are mentioned in such texts like the *Bhagavati Ārādhanā*. There is a detailed discussion on how an individual is supposed to prepare himself for such a death and what are the difficulties a practitioner of such a death faces in his way to voluntarily and peacefully killing himself.

In this age when the issue of right to death and euthanasia of different forms are being hotly debated, the Jaina community takes no active part in such debates. But they go on practising self-killing silently.

An article recently published has given the statistics of such self-killing. According to this article, some 240 persons of different age groups had terminated their lives willingly during the past ten years.

It is also quite revealing that the number of monks who opted for such self-killing is less than the number of ordinary householders. Again, among the householders, there is an almost equal representation of males and females. It is something which needs to be attended to. Apart from a few Jaina scholars, the practising Jainas do whatever they do more or less silently. In this age of propaganda this is an exception.

In this connection I would like to say that when we speak about the disintegration of India and the Indian culture, we always think of it in the context of the political situation. But culturally, silently, deliberately, or perhaps due to ignorance, a larger agenda of cultural disintegrity is on for a long time. This agenda is being worked out more by the educated people than by the common man or political people. Apparently, those who are in need consciously or unconsciously offer, project, discuss and defend a theory that India is a multiple culture; it is not one single culture because people of so many cultures live in India. On this basis what they say is quite clear. But in the process what they have done is that they have tried to convince people the world over that Jainism and Buddhism are parallel to Hinduism in the same way in which Parsi religious tradition and Islam tradition are.

In fact, the Jaina tradition is such an integral part of the classical Indian culture that we cannot compare it and place it on the same level with other cultures. Unfortunately, many of us have done that and this has made the Buddhists, the Jainas, the Hindus suspicious of each other. We have

been made to fight because a *false identity* has been created—that Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism are very different. But this false identity disappears when you look at their practices and also the thinking. When you study the literature of these three traditions you find that they are indeed very close. In spite of all the internal differences they form one integral group.

These similarities notwithstanding, there is one dissimilarity and that is regarding their concern for death. Of course, it does not mean that the provision of self-killing was not there in the Hindu tradition, and that too among the Hindu females. There has been a long tradition of self-killing but I have not found any systematic study of this phenomenon nor have I found any statistical data.

Instead of taking 'death' as the theme, I am going to deal with 'Death, Killing and Self-killing'. One reason to take up this topic is simple. The very use of the expression 'killing' and 'self-killing' suggests that either killing, as when a murderer kills an innocent person, or self-killing as practised in many communities, however you look at them, every culture provides many examples of self-killing. Even people nowadays consider that Socrates' decision to end his life by voluntarily accepting the hemlock was a case of self-killing. But then, the death of Seneca was also self-killing. Fully, consciously he committed himself to death. There were many other persons who had done so. Thus, both killing and self-killing lead to death. But why then do I distinguish between death on the one hand and killing and self-killing on the other? One reason is that killing and killing oneself are unnatural deaths. I am sure people will be astonished to hear this and the Jainas particularly will raise grave objections. But what do I mean when I say killing and self-killing are comparable to unnatural death?

Natural death

Let us first take up death—the natural death of an aged person due to infirmities. According to biological laws, his body decays and eventually he dies. Now, compare such death with killing and self-killing. In both these cases we find these are explicit and conscious deaths.

There is, however, one very important difference between killing and self-killing on the one hand, and death, on the other. For example, one may point out that when a man grows old, we often hear him say 'I want to die. Enough is enough'. That is a very common experience. So it is not that there is no desire to die but the desire is ineffective. So, how can I distinguish between death, killing and self-killing simply in terms of the absence and presence of desire to die? There may be the desire to die even in case of, otherwise, normal death. What is meant is that not only there is a desire, but the desire is also effective. The first is a conscious desire and in the second, the desire is effective. In the case of natural death, even when the desire is present, that desire is not an effective desire, but it is just there without mattering. But in cases of killing, or self-killing, not only that there is a desire to die, but the desire leads to consciously adopting appropriate measures to terminate life.

In the case of an old man awaiting a natural death, he desires that the sooner the death comes the better; but he does not make any active effort to terminate life. So the desire is ineffective. By contrast, in killing and self-killing the desire is an effective desire. This is one reason why I say killing and self-killing are unnatural. Because, here the person concerned not only desires to die but also takes all measures to ensure that the desire gets fulfilled. Why this makes this kind of death unnatural? Because, there is something more to it, because the desire of

death is not normal here. Man's normal attitude is the attitude of love for life and fear of death. Fear of death is one of the original instincts present in all living creatures. In the texts of psychology evidences are given that if a child is placed before a poisonous snake, the child tries to embrace it. It does not know what a snake is! But if you throw a two-month-old baby up in the sky and catch it, it will show every sign of fear. The fear out of loss of support is one of the original instincts of a living creature. So this love for life is natural and desire for death is unnatural. In case of killing and self-killing man is adopting the unnatural attitude to life, the attitude of welcoming death rather than fearing it. The attitude of aversion to life is quite unnatural. If it was not so, if we normally loved death instead of life, the human race at least would have been extinct by now. The very fact that we continue to live is the greatest puzzle or wonder. It is the greatest wonder because we love life in spite of the awareness that death is inevitable. Knowing that inevitability we are still so much in love with life! How can this be? We know that all our efforts, our dreams, our activities, creations, in short, the entire meaning of life will come to nought after death. This certainty could lead a man to madness. Yet how is that the entire human race has not committed suicide? What is the mystery that keeps us going? There is much thinking on the subject in our tradition.

The thinking is, though everyone is aware of the phenomenon of death, its inevitability does not figure anywhere in our talks, behaviour, thinking, activities or the life we live every moment. We have somehow managed to move that awareness to the margin of our explicit consciousness. That is, we are conscious, we are aware, but we are not actively, effectively, explicitly aware of it. It is not in our explicit awareness which it has to be if it is to be effective. Had the inevitability of death been in our explicit consciousness every moment, we would perhaps not been able to live and human race would have been extinct. So there is a point in saying that somehow awareness of death has been pushed to the margin, or explicit awareness may be present in the subconsciousness but it actually plays no role in our day-to-day planning, thinking etc. If it did, then our lives would have been altogether different. This our ancestors knew very well. So they had something definite to say how it happened. Their answer is that there must be some active force which has made us practically forgetful about death. They named this force *Māyā* or ignorance. You may say now that this explanation is understandable in case of ordinary, unintelligent persons. But how come that even the most educated, intelligent and even wise people have been so deceived by *Māyā*? How *Māyā* could deceive the wise people and make them behave as if death is not there, that they are to live forever?

The greatest wonder

So one of the greatest wonders is that how, in the midst of inevitability of death and experience of death around us every moment, could we hold on to our desire for life and also live.

Dharmarāja in the form of a crane in the *Mahābhārata* asked a few questions to Yudhisthira. One of the questions was what is the greatest wonder? '*Kimāshcarya ca vada*'. In reply Yudhishthira said:

> *Ahanyahani bhutāni gachchantiha yamālayam;*
> *Sheshāsthāvaramichhanti kimāshcaryamatah param.*

That is, 'We all are witnessing death in this world day after day; still we behave as if we are going to continue forever. What can be a greater wonder than this?'

This is a clear evidence that most of us have been deceived by *Māyā*. Hence, we are not aware of death. Even the wise persons face the same predicament. The question is, why? And answer is there in *Sri Sri Chandi* when Medhā Rishi says:

> *Jnāninām api cetānsi devi bhagavati hi sā;*
> *Valāt ākrishya mohāya mahāmāyā prayachhati.* (1.55)

'Bhagavati Mahāmāyā forcefully attracts even the minds of the discriminating people and throws them into the abyss of delusion.' Here it is not ordinary *Māyā*, but *Mahāmāyā*. Obviously, now the question is how to get rid of this delusion, how to make the awareness of death explicit in our lives? There are two ways. One is the morbid way.

In pathological cases some people are always afraid of death. This is a pathological case. Why? Because this awareness is explicit awareness. It does not become positively creative. It often produces the negative result of suicide.

Our philosophical and religious literature have drawn attention to the fact that we need to be explicitly aware of the inevitability of death, not in order to terminate life, not to use it for negative purposes, but to make use of it in the most creative way and this creative way is the way of *dharma*.

There is a beautiful *shloka* in the *Hitopadesh* which says: '*Ajarāmaravat prājno vidyāmartham ca cintayet / grihita iba kesheshu mrityunā dharmamācaret.*' (1.p.3) That is, a wise person should think that he is deathless when he is trying to attain knowledge and earn wealth; but he must think that death is pulling his hair when he wants to practise *dharma*. In other words, the verse shows how to initiate oneself earnestly into the path of *dharma*. It asks you to think of the fact that death is behind you and going to catch you by the locks any moment. Whenever you think of this reality, you come to *dharma*. Therefore, because we have love for life, we want to protect it against this inevitable death. So love for death is unnatural, fear of death is natural. Once we bring it to our explicit consciousness and relate it to our natural inclination for life, we are bound to develop the spirit of enquiry about the mechanism that can enable us to defeat death. And that is *dharma*. But then, we must remember that the original reason for going to *dharma* is to make our awareness of death not only explicit, but also creative. So this is one aspect of what I say awareness of death and the naturalness and unnaturalness about it.

Types of self-killing

So far we have spoken of killing and self-killing. That they are unnatural is accepted. But what is the difference? The difference apparently seems to be that in the second case the person kills himself out of his own desire which in its turn prompts him to take appropriate measures to put an end to life. This self-killing has been again divided into various types. For example, the measure to terminate life willingly may again be adopted directly or indirectly. One may consciously desire to die. The desire is so strong that he himself takes measures to kill himself. This sort of self-killing is either suicide or other than suicide. This also is a case of awareness of death and making it effective. You may ask, why some forms of death are not only recognized but also applauded?

Now self-killing is of two types. Some self-killings are condemned by society while some are applauded. Sometimes they are openly applauded, sometimes silently. The best example of such self-killing is when a person chooses to lay down his life to defend his own country. He knows life will end. Why not then do some heroic act? Why not do some good act even if that means courting death? We never condemn

such self-killing. But if the killing is directed to oneself which amounts to suicide, it is condemnable in society.

Suicide is again both a crime and a sin. In all the religious traditions, unless under special circumstances, suicide and mass suicide are condemned. Suppose a person attempts to commit suicide and fails, he is punishable in the court of law. However, even if the law pardons him, the sin he has incurred thereby is going to surface in the form of inevitable suffering in some life—in this life or in future lives.

So, you see, death is such a phenomenon which has various dimensions. It involves various considerations—legal, social, and political. Very often these considerations clash with one another. For example, in Sparta, it was a common practice that if a child was born handicapped it was thrown off a hilltop and killed. This practice was then socially acceptable. But if that custom kept going, we would not have today any institutions for the maintenance, growth and education of the handicapped. Similarly, if the man who makes an attempt to commit suicide and succeeds, he can avoid legal punishment. But he cannot avoid spiritual or religious punishment. Apart from that, even when a person kills himself and is not condemned, what are our criteria? Who is to be the judge? I give an example. Suppose a lady out of love commits suicide when her beloved passed away. She could not bear the pain of separation, so she committed suicide. What do we do in such a case? We may not publicly applaud it but silently we respect her sentiment.

What about 'Sati'? Almost all of us condemn it. But two things we do not do. One thing, we have not taken any statistics of the Sati. Indeed, till today no systematic study has been made of this tradition. The other thing is the mischief played by careful selection of terms or language. In our entire tradition there is no such expression as *satidāha*. There has been a term, *sahamaran* or *anumaran*, but not *satidāha*. A mere change makes a lot of difference. In English it comes out as 'widow-burning'. There might have been some practices and cases of widow-burning. But to blame the Hindu system of thoughts and practices for widow-burning is utterly, factually and conceptually wrong as it is an attempt to prove that all widows were compelled to die against their wishes.

Sahamaran

In Bengal, when the law banning 'Sati' had not been enacted as yet, one great disciple of Nigamananda, his mother, decided to commit *sahamaran*. At that time, though law banning Sati had not been there, it was made obligatory for the people to immediately report any such attempt to the nearest thana so that police officers could come and try to dissuade the lady from the act. Accordingly, this case was also reported. As a follow-up action a British officer came and tried to dissuade her from committing 'Sati' and also ascertained whether she was being forced to die, or not. Unable to argue with that British official what the lady did was that she asked someone to light a lamp. When it was lighted she put her hand into the flame till it was completely burnt. She did not blink her eyes. The officer could not stand the sight and left. So, you see, such determination is also possible. Therefore the idea is we have to draw a distinction between all these attempts for so many reasons.

One good reason is that we should not place all self-killing in the category of suicide. Normally, suicide is committed in a fit of emotion, when people cannot exercise their power of judgement properly and *decide* to die. Suicide is committed mostly to just avoid the suffering that the person may be undergoing at the time. He has his

confused way of thinking. He calculates that death is preferable to a life of suffering. Such a judgement in most cases is wrong as the person does not have a proper training, capability, or the right state of mind to decide correctly.

Self-killing is not suicide

But self-killing, whether in the Jaina tradition or in the Hindu tradition, is not suicide in that sense. Mostly this is done for a number of reasons and under certain definite considerations. One such consideration is that it is done for some authentic spiritual or religious reasons. They do not do it to attract the attention of other people, to glorify himself or herself. These are inauthentic motives behind their action.

The second point is that they do not want to commit self-killing in haste or on the spur of the moment. Not only do they take a long preparation, they also take a conscious vow or *vrata* to do that. In the Jaina tradition sometimes the *vrata* technique needs twelve years to become effective. This long preparation requires them to purify the grosser habits of both body and mind. Of the grosser habits is the habit of taking food. They gradually minimize their food intake. And while training themselves to overcome the habits of the body, they also try to overcome the habits of the mind, namely envy, jealousy, hatred, fear and so on. So fear does not motivate them to die. They are permitted to give up their body only when they have effectively overcome their fear of death. At the same time, what is more important is that this type of self-killing is the annihilation of the opposite desire—the desire for life. That means they have simultaneously overcome the fear of death and attachment to life.

How is it possible? Normally, in order to bring back a man from the jaws of the fear of life, we provoke his desire for life so that his fear of death is enhanced and he does not commit suicide. But here, in the above case, the situation is otherwise.

This attitude towards death also differs in different traditions. It will be completely different in the tradition where the ideology of multiple life is practised. The single-life ideology creates greater attachment to life than multiple-life ideology as is in our case. Within the single-life ideology, the materialists or *bhutachaitanyavādins* are more attached to life than those who believe in a permanent soul which survives a physical death. I wili just mention one such case of voluntary death out of resolve and according to the complete observance of religious procedure.

Some years ago there lived a highly intellectual and wise man named Phanibhushan Tarkavagish. I am proud that he is my *Param Guru*. He was a great Naiyāyika. In ordinary life, apparently to other people, he was very much fond of nice food. Subsequently, one day he developed some problems in the prostate gland and came to know that there was no treatment for the disease except surgery. He asked the doctor what would be the expectancy of his life if he did not go for the operation. The doctor replied that in that case he would be alive for two more days only. Pandit Phanibhushan then immediately sent for his disciple, who is my direct teacher, to purchase a railway ticket to Benares. He went there and stopped taking all medicines. Two days passed but he was still alive. He then gave up food. Then also he was alive. He now stopped taking water and died eventually in full consciousness and peace of mind, exercising his power of judgement. This is called self-killing proper.

Thus it is obvious that our *shāstras* or scriptures permit voluntary death under certain specific conditions. They also suggest different measures one has to follow in order to prepare for death. But they have

always condemned suicide. In fact, if we could educate our children about the grave consequences of suicide as narrated in detail in our *shāstras*, that would have acted as an effective deterrent to self-destruction of young boys and girls.

Ultimately we would say that in the long religious tradition of our country, death has not always been looked upon as a very bad thing. It always has taught us about the inevitability of death. In other cultures also such teachings are available. Frankly speaking, death itself teaches us how to manage death. One does not have to be a great philosopher to learn how to manage it. So suicide or self-killing done properly is actually a great management of death vis-à-vis the management of life. Acharya Shankara says, what we ordinary people call 'death' is not death in the eyes of a spiritually evolved person. It is just a passing phase. It is inevitable, but not a thing to be afraid of. On the contrary, final death is a thing to be hoped for. For that, however, enough meticulous preparation is required. We must prepare ourselves and do our *sādhanā* to hasten that final death. Once that is accepted as our goal, fear of death will disappear. Once we use death in this sense, instead of blessing one by saying 'You live for hundred years', we can say 'Please, you leave tomorrow'. ■

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* This is an abridged version of the Mahadeolal Saraogi Endowment Lecture, Pradyot Kumar Mukhopadhyay, formerly Professor of Philosophy, Jadavpur University, delivered at the Institute on 4 March 2010.

On Death

This life may end at any moment. No one knows when. Equip yourself for the journey with spiritual treasures. To arrive empty-handed at an unknown place involves much suffering and sorrow. Birth is inevitably followed by death. At death you go to an unknown place, so you must prepare yourself for the journey. Always be ready for the great call.

—Swami Brahmananda

★★★

Besides, nobody has any control over birth and death—all these happen according to the will of God. He alone knows how long He will keep anyone in this world. All bodies die; there's no exception to this rule. Your son is gone; you, too, have to go some day. Your wife, son, daughter, in fact all whom you consider to be your very own—all have to depart; none can live eternally.

In the Gita, the Lord says: 'Anyone born must surely die, and anyone dead must surely be reborn. So you must not lament for something that is inevitable.' Death being inevitable for anyone coming to this earth, He forbids us to lament. . . .

None in this world is really your own whom you think to be so. Only God is truly your own. He keeps company in life and death; He is the Soul of one's soul. The relationship with Him is eternal.

—Swami Shivananda

FORGET NOT

The Pen and the Sword of Guru Gobind Singh

TRILOCHAN SINGH

Today I discuss a topic which is rarely discussed. Very few people know that Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, was a prolific writer and a great scholar. He wrote much on Sikh philosophy, ancient Indian history and social psychology which unfortunately have not been seriously studied. People generally know Guru Gobind Singh through the *sword*. But the word 'sword' in the context of his life is greatly misunderstood.

Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th and the last Guru of Sikhism, throughout his writings has called himself a poet as Guru Nanak did. In all his writings—religious, secular, or historical—Guru Gobind Singh addresses himself only as a poet. His consciousness as a man was that of a poet first. The concept of poet as believed by Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh was, however, different from what we believe at present. For them the 'poet' was a 'prophet' and the prophet, a poet. Sidney Spencer said that great poets were prophets. It means that all great persons of God having some revelations can easily express themselves and their expressions are poetical. Mohammad was illiterate but the inspirational verses that he uttered were rhythmic and poetic. The verses in *Qur'an* are rhythmic.

Guru Gobind Singh's works can be divided into two—philosophical and historical. The philosophical works include *Jap Sāhib*, *Akāl Takth*, *Akāl Ustat*, *Jnāna Prabodh* and about a thousand other verses. Then we have his historical works. He preferred to write on ancient Indian history and he starts writing about this history from the point of creation. He takes up three cosmic minds which we call Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva. To Guru Gobind Singh all intellectuals, poets and *rishis* were avatāras of Brahmā because the cosmic mind is behind all intellectuals, creative thinkers and writers. He starts with Vālmiki and ends with Kālidāsa.

Similarly, according to him, the cosmic mind which manifested on Earth as saviours with the sword were the avatāras of Vishnu—the ten avatāras of Vishnu and other minor avatāras. The avatāras of Shiva were the ascetics—all the ascetics, including the Jainas and the Nāthapanthis. There were nine Nāthas. Some however, consider Nāthas to be eleven in number.

The idea that Guru Gobind Singh tried to impress on his readers was that these cosmic forces, cosmic minds, when manifested as human beings, were just not human beings. They were superhuman beings, but not gods. In the whole creation of the world there are thousands of Brahmās, thousands of Vishnus and thousands of Shivas according to him. The idea is that there is not only this universe, but there is universe behind this universe and the creation is so vast and mysterious that we should turn our minds only to One Supreme Being and seek His refuge. The fundamental principle, of Sikhism is: 'There is only One Being, and truth is Its name'. It says that in comparison with the Fearless, Formless One,

innumerable gods are as dust. The One is above the traditional Hindu deities, such as Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. 'Millions of Vishnu has It created, millions of universes has It spawned, millions of Shivas has It raised and assimilated,' says the *Guru Granth*.

So the Guru wrote about them in such a way that they are conceived as superhuman beings, but human beings nevertheless. Every human being, he says, can rise to that stage. Every human being can become as great a poet as Vālmiki, as great a warrior, say, as Lord Krishna or Lord Rāma, or as great a mystic or ascetic as Gorakhnath or Pārashvanātha.

He further indicates his own philosophy clearly as an independent philosopher. When he writes, about Krishna Avatāra or Rāma Avatāra he gives his own evaluation. To him, Rāma and Rahim were great saints and sages, but human beings—not God. He says: I worship only the Ultimate Being. In focusing on the One, Sikhism thus respects the many gods of Hinduism.

Some of Guru Gobind Singh's writings are not available today. For example, the 'Krishna Avatāra', which he translated from *Dasham Granth* of his time, is slightly different. Some chapters of his original work are missing from the present *Dasham Granth*. However, what is important to note is that he presented Lord Krishna or Rāma as superhuman beings, whose examples must be emulated. The sages lived in different ages like the Satya-Yuga, Tretā-Yuga, Dwāpara-Yuga and Kali-Yuga. On this point Guru Nanak and the other Gurus were very clear. They said that those *yugas* were the creation of human beings. The same sky still prevails. The same mountains still stand. The same rivers keep flowing. It is only human character which has created different *yugas* by glorifying the moral values of different times. That is, the sages and saints can create certain *yugas* in a *kalpa*. That was the idea. These *yugas*, the Gurus say, are not the creation of gods. They are creations of our own evolution or devolution. There was devolution of morals in every *yuga* down to the Kali-Yuga. This happened because we were not conscious. In this way the Gurus have given a very clear picture of ancient history. They have also given new interpretations of the concept of the avatāras. In the *Guruvāni* and *Guru Granth*, there are frequent references to Brahmā, Vishnu, Indra and the great sages.

Guru Gobind's philosophy

We come now to Guru Gobind Singh's own philosophy. Very few people know that he was a great mystic. His thinking was so deep and profound that he tried to focus the presence of God in man. For example, in the Bhakti literature we find devotees weeping and wailing when they are deprived of the vision of God. This pang of separation at one point torments them. But this mood of agony changes as they attain God-vision. Then they express their abundant joy that flows out of the union with the Beloved. By contrast, throughout the writings of Guru Gobind Singh, we find God visibly present before him. In every verse of the Guru you will find the visible presence of God. He describes God in all His aspects as Beauty, as Truth, and also describes His negative attributes. He says, God even listens to the cry of an ant which we, human beings, can never hear. He says that the soundless cry of an ant reaches God earlier than the trumpeting of an elephant. He says: *Hathi ki chingad pāchhey pahuchte hai. Chiti ki pukār paheley hi pahuchte hai.* It also means that when the most insignificant human being remembers Him in some lonely corner, God hears him. But when a dictator or a mighty man declares his presence, God turns a deaf ear.

Throughout his writings the Guru tells us that Hindus, Muslims, Christians—these are manifestations of different messengers of

God. In one of his writings he tells us that God sends all His messengers as His sons. All prophets were His sons, not one particular prophet. But sons deviated from the message given by God. Some of the sons had declared that unless you worship me as the mediator, you cannot reach God. I am the only way!

Guru Gobind Singh says, all the prophets, and he names them, even Ramananda, Gorakhnath and others were all sons of God. They brought the same message, same revelation. But these messages were sometimes distorted during the prophet's lifetime or later by their followers. The Guru therefore declared that nobody should call him a god as that would be an insult to God. All prophets, all saints, he says, have their identity of spirit with God. They attain unity with Him. They are one with Him. God speaks through them. It is a sin nevertheless to call them God. Never call an apostle God, says the Guru and adds that whosoever calls him God would go to hell. That is the only context where he has used that word—'hell'.

Guru Gobind Singh says: God is so forgiving that there is no sin in the world which is not forgiven by Him. You remember Him. You go near Him and He also comes to you. If you go one step towards Him, He comes forward to you a thousand steps.

Moreover, he says that everyone should seek his own path. As for our temples and churches, he said that those were built to cultivate the habit of remembering Him. We, human beings, go to the Temple, Gurudwara, or the Church to worship Him, to meditate upon Him. If we do not go to our Temples or any other places of worship, then they do not serve our purpose. There is a verse in the *Guru Granth* which says that a Muslim fakir meets Kabir and asks him: 'You are a Muslim by birth. Did you not ever go to the mosque?' He said: 'I did go. In fact, I was going there. But God met me on the way and said, "I am not there. If you are going to the mosque to find me, I am not there".'

What do we see today in our temples, gurudwaras, and churches? Do we maintain the sanctity of these places? Do we try to feel the presence of God there in the way our prophets wanted us to do? Do we seek His light, His wisdom there? That is the first purpose of any temple—to spread God's name, His message, His wisdom.

Guru Nanak generally preached in the open. Wherever he sat, the place immediately turned into a shrine. Guru Nanak came to Calcutta when it was just a village and the place where he sat down later flourished and came to be known as the 'Badi Sikh Sangha Gurudwara.' The ninth Guru also came and sat close to that place which is known as 'Choti Sangat'. We had these *sangats* (holy assemblies) also in Dacca when Dacca was not even known as a city. The Sikh Gurus saw the future of these places. They saw that these places would be centres of religion and culture in future.

Guru Gobind's philosophy lays stress on internal worship, or praying with oneself. He says, if a person thinks that by drinking milk and eating fruits he can achieve God, he is having a wrong notion. Even monkeys drink milk and eat fruits. Do they achieve God? No.

Even silence does not allow you to reach God. He says, the owl keeps silent but it lives in darkness. Similarly, if you go to live in the solitude of the cave, no doubt there you will get some external silence. But, along with that, there must be also internal prayer, internal light, internal silence, and some internal progress. Unless these things are there, your going to the cave, your surviving on milk and fruits, your abstinence are meaningless. We abstain from certain things externally, but they dominate our minds internally. The Sikh Gurus criticize such muddle. External abstinence is needed, says Guru Gobind, but internal restraint too is required. He says, whatever be your religious

faith, say your prayers with sincerity. That is what God wants—a sincere prayer, or a pure *bhāvanā*. There is the example of Ajāmila who was a sinner. But at the time of death, when he uttered 'Nārāyana', the name of his son, his *bhāvanā* became pure for a few moments, because 'Nārāyana' is also the name of God. And simply for that reason, He appeared in person and forgave Ajāmila. The Guru says, God appreciates true devotion and not the external show of devotion, scholarly argumentations, or high-sounding words of the pundits.

Guru Gobind Singh never minced his words. He did not couch his message in vague words or symbolic language. In his autobiography he wrote to this effect: I am proclaiming this revelation to the world which God graciously bestowed on me. I shall neither live in dread of anyone nor seek anyone's favour and patronage. I shall not accept the holy garb or the path of any traditional religion, creed or cult. I shall sow eternal seeds of the religion of love in this world. I shall not worship stone gods, nor shall I be carried away by the creeds displaying these gods. I ever sing the name of the Infinite. I have achieved the presence of the Lord. I contemplate and meditate only on the attribute of the Infinite. I shall neither turn my mind on any one besides the One known, nor shall I concentrate on a letter or the name of any other deity except the One Supreme.

Concept of the soul

There has been a lot of confusion regarding Guru Gobind's concept of the soul. There is a tendency in every religion to misunderstand the message of a prophet, his symbols or his thoughts. So we misinterpret and misuse them. Emotionally we attach such meaning to them which the prophet did not even think of. The metaphor of 'sword' is one such that must be understood properly.

The use of the 'sword' by Guru Gobind became necessary. Why? When we read the life of Lord Rāma and Lord Krishna, there also we find the sword. The same sword! The sword of Kamsa was not different from the sword of Krishna, so for as the material was concerned. The difference was that one was the sword of *Dharma* and the other of *adharma*. One was raised to uphold righteousness, the other for perpetrating tyranny. Similarly, there was no material difference between the sword of Lord Rāma and that of Rāvana. The only difference was the purpose for which it was used.

Guru Gobind went a step forward. You see, we have assigned many attributes, many names to God. However, they all mean the One Ultimate. Guru Gobind also introduced one more attribute to God. He called Him 'the Sword'. He addresses God as '*Sri Khadga*'. *Sri* means supreme. To him God is a visible Almighty Sword. He creates, preserves, and destroys when he wants to. Throughout his writings the Guru uses the sword as a symbol for God. He had to raise the sword for a purpose.

If you see the history of Punjab during the tenth century, you will find that Punjab was largely Buddhist. In Jallandhar alone there were about 150 Buddhist monasteries and quite a number of Shaiva monasteries. But all of them were wiped out. So Guru Gobind believed that every religion must have the capacity to defend itself, the power to protect itself. It should not go to any political regime and seek protection. You see, in the nascent period of Jainism, some of the Jains used to go to the kings for protection from the *rishis* and the King destroyed some of the ashramas in the Mt Abu region. But that was not Guru Gobind's idea. He emphasized that every person should understand what *Dharma* is, what righteousness is. And for defending it, every one must be able to use the sword. So the sword should be used only for upholding righteousness. But if you are not able to understand what *Dharma* is, you cannot and should not use the sword. So

he has always tried to discipline the 'Khālsā' for the purpose. There is a verse in Brajabhāshā that says:

Khanda bihandan khadga khandan
Atran mandan bar bandan
Kar danda akhandan tej prachandan
Jyot amandan bhang pravan
Sukh santan karnan durmat harnan
Kilvik harnan assaran
Jai jai jag karan srishto vāran
Mama prati pālan, jaya deva jayate.

The rough translation of the verse is: Sword Almighty! You cut to pieces the wicked and the depraved. You scatter and annihilate the armies of the haughty. You make the battlefields glorious by bestowing victory on the righteous. Irresistible, unchallengable is the power of the spectre in Your mighty hand. Splendour is Your dazzling brightness. Light shines and shimmers from Your Divine presence like the blazing light of the sun. Sword Almighty! You are the bestower of peace, happiness on saints. You strike terror into the hearts of the tyrants and annihilate the wicked and the vile. Sword Almighty! I take refuge in Thee. Victory to Thee, Almighty Sword, Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Victory to Thee, Almighty Sword, who is my sustainer and protector.

So Guru Gobind's point is, if the use of sword is inspired by the purpose of protecting the downtrodden, it is right to use it. He himself had fought about 20 battles. Unfortunately, the first fifteen battles he had to fight against the Hindu rulers. They thought Guru Gobind would occupy their territories. The Guru won the battles, yet did not occupy a single territory. He had to fight against the Muslims also. Emperor Aurangzeb sent a very large army to attack Guru Gobind Singh. His son, Bahadur Shah, was in command. When Bahadur Shah was told that Guru Gobind Singh had an army of only 5,000 soldiers and he was a *darvesh*, he wrote back to his father that he thought it was futile to attack a *darvesh* and his small band of followers with an army of 500,000 soldiers. Aurangzeb sent four military envoys to ascertain that the report was accurate. The envoys corroborated the report and the strike was abandoned. Later of course Aurangzeb kept on receiving bad news when Bahadur Shah was removed from Punjab.

Guru Gobind Singh founded the '*Khālsā*', the militant Sikh theocracy, to fight the intolerant Mughals. Even in the 18th century there was a lot of militancy in Punjab. But the Sikhs took care that no holy man was hurt. For example, once the ruler of 'Kasur' had kidnapped some Hindu women. When the Sikhs received this information, they attacked the ruler with a force of ten thousand soldiers. They almost destroyed the army of the traitor and rescued the women. The Afghan ruler was also uprooted. There was a Sufi saint residing in that place. The battered Muslims approached him telling that it was not safe for him to stay there any longer. But to their dismay, the Sufi replied: If the attackers were the Sikhs, they would not harm him. But if they were the imitators of the Sikhs, harm might befall him. And it so happened that on their way back, the Sikh army stopped at his place, took off their shoes, saluted him, made offerings and sought his blessings. This was the situation in the 18th century. But when this sword was raised to fight for our freedom during the British period, the freedom fighters were labelled 'terrorists'. History, however, forgives none. Righteous people will surely emerge, for it is the land of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. It is the land of the *rishis* who gave us the eternal hymns. That is our hope. ■

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* This article is the edited version of a lecture, Dr Trilochan Singh delivered at the Institute on 6 January 1992.

'Three Sisters'

SONA ROY

In a patriarchal society, the meek, submissive woman is held up as the noble ideal. But in this article I would like to consider the reverse angle: three women who have the courage and determination to challenge the socio-political order that deprives them of justice and relegates them to the margin: Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, Shakespeare's Goneril and Tagore's Chandalika.

Aeschylus' Clytemnestra

Let us begin with Clytemnestra, Queen of Argos, as presented by the dramatist Aeschylus in the Oresteian trilogy at Athens in 458 B.C. It is interesting to note that, in Homeric legend, the killing of Agamemnon was a dynastic matter; he was executed by his cousin Aegisthus, with no mention of his wife's participation. Agamemnon's son Orestes returns home in due course and kills Aegisthus; the early tales merely mention that he slew the tyrant's paramour and performed his mother's funeral rites. Aeschylus has chosen the killing of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra in the first play and the killing of Clytemnestra by her son Orestes in the second play of the triology to develop the thesis that private vengeance only leads to blood-feuds and chaos, that the task of punishing the murderer should be handed over to a state-organ like the Court of Areopagus. But in *Agamemnon* Aeschylus gives a full-length portrayal of the Queen. She is the regent in the absence of her husband, during the 10-year war with Troy. The play begins with the arrival of the news of victory—by means of a relay of beacon fires from Troy to Argos in one night. The beacon-relay is Aeschylus' invention but the detailed report of this chain serves to establish Clytemnestra's intelligence and powers of administration. Indeed, the watchman admits that in her 'woman's heart/A man's will nurses hope.'[1]

The Chorus of Argive Elders are perturbed from the very beginning by the one dark act in Agamemnon's past—the sacrifice of his eldest daughter Iphigenia before the Greek host sailed for Troy. Indeed, the first *stasimon* gives a detailed account of the sacrifice, with Clytemnestra on stage, her back to the Chorus, apparently engaged in prayer. They believe that crime does not go unpunished—the fall of Troy proves it. What then do the gods have in store for the victorious King? Agamemnon returns, is welcomed publicly by his wife and persuaded by her to enter the palace, reluctantly walking on crimson tapestries—an act of honour which he himself admits is the due of gods, not men. He is murdered while helpless in the bath, and then the palace doors open to reveal Clytemnestra standing over the murdered bodies of Agamemnon and his mistress Cassandra, Princess of Troy. The Queen boldly addresses the Chorus, admitting her deed, describing in detail the three thrusts with which she stabbed him to death—taking full responsibility as the planner and perpetrator of this intrigue, rather than the mere accomplice of Aegisthus.

> Here where I struck I stand and see my task achieved.
> Yes, this is my work, and I claim it.[2]

When the Chorus, the King's men,

denounce Clytemnestra for slaying her husband, she retorts:

> Why, once before, did you not dare oppose this man? . . .
>
> He was the one you should have driven from Argos; he,
>
> Marked with his daughter's blood, was ripe for punishment.[3]

Aeschylus allows the Queen to reveal her motives for the long deliberated act. Her stand is that Agamemnon had tricked her cruelly ten years ago: in order to bring Iphigenia to the Bay of Aulis, a message had been sent to Clytemnestra that Achilles refused to join the host unless he were wed to the princess. The Queen had sent her first-born suitably decked for the wedding, only to learn that she had been sacrificed in full view of the Greek army on the order of her father the King.

> The guile I used to kill him
> He used himself the first,
> When he by guile uprooted
> The tender plant he gave me,
> And made this house accurst.
> When on my virgin daughter
> His savage sword descended,
> My tears in rivers ran;
> If now by savage sword-thrust
> His ageing days are ended,
> Let shame and conscience ban
> His boasts, where he pays forfeit
> For wrong his guile began.[4]

The Chorus admit the logic of her complaint and are confused as to what is Right or *dike* but they remain loyal to the King. With his death, her authority fades and she has to look to Aegisthus and his guards for support. The first play ends with the Chorus yielding to superior force but waiting for the return to Argos of Agamemnon's son Orestes.

Shakespeare's Goneril

Let us turn to Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Lear's injustice to Cordelia draws the sympathy of one and all yet the injustice to Goneril is hardly noticed. In the first scene of the play, *King* Lear addresses the *Princess* Goneril as 'Our eldest-born' and then orders her to declare her love for him before the Court—as though she were a pet trained to perform tricks in front of guests. She is on parade and obeys his wish, delivering a well-rehearsed speech.

> Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter;
> Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty;
> Beyond what can be valued rich or rare;
> No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
> As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found;
> A love that makes breath poor and speech unable;
> Beyond all manner of so much I love you.[5]
> (I, i, 54-60)

And what is her reward? She is branded as a flatterer, both by Cordelia and literary critics for all succeeding ages! Moreover, she is reduced from the special status of the 'eldest-born' to that of *one* of the daughters, given one-third of the kingdom, which is later enlarged to one-half, because of Cordelia's banishment.

Let us view the situation from Goneril's point of view. She is the eldest; Lear has no sons; she has naturally expected to reign over the *whole* kingdom after his death, since dividing the kingdom was not the rule. Yet here he is depriving her of her rightful possessions, not even through displeasure but merely to gratify a whim, and no one grieves for her. Had it been the case of a son passed over in favour of a daughter, perhaps some male critic would have protested against Lear's dispossession of his first-born. Moreover, the love-test is a trap; if Goneril fails to please Lear with words, she may well lose the portion earmarked for her (as happens to Cordelia shortly after). The speech, then, is not that of a wicked daughter out to defraud a doting father with a false show of love. Rather, it is occasioned by a

battle of wits between Lear (who would love to exalt the youngest over the other two) and Goneril, the eldest-born, fighting to retain her truncated patrimony.

After that one speech (II.54—60) Goneril remains a silent spectator on stage till I.280, when the Court is adjourned; the others leave and she can speak her mind freely to Regan, who is now her equal. She has had time to assess the situation and her immediate concern is to safeguard her prestige and authority; she anticipates trouble and her fears become fact in Act I, sc iii. Lear does not spend his days of retirement in prayer or philosophical discourse. Instead, his sojourn in her house with his hundred knights hampers the exercise of her sovereign sway, both as ruler and as mistress of the household:

> By day and night, he wrongs me;. . .
> His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
> On every trifle. (I, iii, 4-8)

The use of the royal 'we' or 'us' is significant. In fact, Lear's presence creates a rival centre of authority within a limited space, and leads to an inevitable confrontation. Prof. Molly Mahood delivered a talk at Calcutta University (on 9.12.1991) entitled 'When and Where of Shakespearean Tragedy' in which she pointed out that the Great Hall of a castle, in ancient times, served both as the kitchen/banquet-hall as well as the council-chamber. On stage, Lear can be *seen* to usurp Goneril's authority, simply by occupying the chair reserved for the head of the house, instead of the chair on the left of the hostess, which was normally kept for the chief guest. Lear is like the mother who visits her son's house and then proceeds to take over the running of the kitchen, countermanding the orders of the daughter-in-law! Lear is like the retired Professor who, on being invited to attend a Board of Studies meeting in his former Department, carelessly takes the Head's seat, usurping the authority of the new Head and younger colleague. The fact is that Lear's presence undermines Goneril's position but she is not bold enough to tackle Lear directly; she can only advise her steward Oswald to treat Lear with 'weary negligence' in the hope that he would feel slighted and leave for Regan's house.

Lear does not admit his changed status as a guest; when Goneril's steward Oswald addresses him as 'My Lady's father' Lear feels insulted, abuses and even strikes the servant of his hostess. Kent, the newest addition to Lear's retinue, aids and abets him. Since he is in disguise, Kent would appear to be a lowly serving-man and his tripping-up of Goneril's steward can be justly termed as 'riotous' behaviour. It is worth recalling here that, in Act II, sc ii, when the disguised Kent again assaults Oswald in the house of Gloucester, the 'fiery' Duke of Cornwall, Regan's husband, has no hesitation in putting him in the stocks, for disturbing the peace, knowing full well that Kent is a servant of Lear.

Shakespeare probably read John Higgins' edition of *The Mirror For Magistrates* (1574) in which Cordila says that Lear spent six months with Gonorell, then she reduced his train of three score Knights and squires.[6] Shakespeare reduces the period of stay to less than a month and increases the number of dependants, to make Goneril's impatience more culpable—but does she really deserve Lear's outburst? When Goneril advises Lear to reduce his train and keep about him men of his own age, he responds with hideous rage, calling on Nature to make her barren or let her pregnancies miscarry! A father uttering such curses—yet critics accept Lear's assessment of Goneril as a 'monster'.

Goneril and Regan are bracketed together in popular imagination as the 'wicked' sisters but it is worth noting that Shakespeare himself presents Regan as the less dutiful daughter. Indeed, Regan strikes

the nail on the head with her shrewd assessment of the situation:

> How, in one house,
> Should many people, under two commands,
> Hold amity? 'Tis hard: almost impossible.'
> (II, sc iv, 238—240)

Goneril is also unfortunate in her marriage. The Duke of Albany is a meek, God-fearing man, unfit to govern. In contrast, the Duke of Cornwall, Regan's husband, is a man of action. He approves Regan's strategy in choosing to meet her father in Gloucester's house, not her own. He does not hesitate to exercise his authority and puts Kent in the stocks for disturbing the peace. In Act II, sc. iv, when Lear curses the absent Goneril in their presence, Cornwall is moved to protest. When Lear storms out of Gloucester's house, Cornwall supports the sisters' move to reduce Lear's train as 'politic'. It is *Regan* who whittles Lear's train to five-and-twenty, then ten, then five and finally asks 'What needs one?' But Lear has no curses for her comparable to the tirade he had earlier launched against his 'eldest-born'. He storms out in high rage, though there is a storm brewing and, again, it is Regan who counsels Gloucester to 'Shut up your doors' against his return. The madness of Lear in the heath in Act III is Shakespeare's invention; even if it is regarded as a natural consequence of his daughters' unkindness, surely Regan is more culpable than Goneril for the same.

Goneril makes a brief appearance in Act III; Cornwall informs her that the French army has landed in England and Goneril leaves for home, with Edmund as her escort. It may be noted that it is not Goneril but Regan who relishes the blinding of the 'traitor' Gloucester. Goneril is attracted to Edmund, who contrasts favourably with the 'cowish' Albany; but in Act IV sc. i she is chiefly concerned with the political situation, as befits the ruler. She is openly contemptuous of Albany's manhood but her hopes of an affair with Edmund are frustrated by the untimely death of Cornwall. This brings Regan and Edmund together, as the commander of the forces of Cornwall; when Albany refuses to accept the low-born Edmund as an equal in council, Regan offers to marry him and Goneril is thus betrayed both by her sibling and her paramour. As Lear's daughter she has no softness in her; she poisons her rival Regan. In Act V, sc. i , when Edmund is mortally wounded by Edgar and Albany reads her intercepted letter, she makes a defiant exit, refusing to offer excuses for her conduct and it is reported that she has ended her life by stabbing herself—not for fear of the consequences but, perhaps, because life is no longer worth living.

In conclusion, it may be recalled that even in the sixteenth century, politics and sentiment hardly worked in tandem. In 1554, the Catholic Queen Mary ordered the execution of her cousin, Lady Jane Grey; Queen Elizabeth I kept her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, in captivity for nineteen years, from the age of 26 to the age of 45, before signing her death-warrant in 1587. Yet no one talks of them as monsters of cruelty or 'unnatural' hags. Such condemnation is reserved for Goneril alone.

Tagore's Chandalika

Let us turn from Europe to India, from the 16th century to the 20th century and Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali dance-drama *Chandalika* (*The Untouchable Girl*). The heroine Prakriti is humiliated by the village girls, who advise the flower-sellers, the curd-seller and the bangle-seller not to let Prakriti handle their wares, else no one will buy them. She cries out against this injustice:

> He who sent me into this dark (world) of insults,
> I shall not worship, I shall not worship,
> I shall not worship that God.[7]

She is estranged from her mother because she refuses to accept the stigma of untouchability which the upper-caste Hindus have heaped on them for generations. Tagore shows Prakriti awakening to a sense of selfhood through her contact with the enlightened Buddhist monk Ananda, who accepts her as a human being and drinks water from her hands. She dances in exultation:

> Just one handful of water
> Washed away the black stain of my previous births. . .[8]

When her mother upbraids her for not performing the chores allotted to the untouchables, Prakriti replies:

> He has said to me,
> 'Do not debase yourself.
> You belong to the human race,
> human blood flows in your veins. . . .
> Oh mother, for shame, do not debase yourself,
> That is a sin. . . .
> I am not a *chandali*. . .[9]

In her new awareness of herself as a person, as a woman, she seeks to ensnare Ananda and bind him to herself, even demanding that her mother use her magic spells to accomplish the deed. But when she sees Ananda encircled in flames—metaphoric representation of lust—she is repelled by her own desire, begs her mother to recall her spells and prays that Ananda may emerge triumphant, over himself. The ballet ends with Prakriti prostrating herself at the feet of Ananda, who blesses her and departs.

It is worth noting that all these characters—Clytemnestra, Goneril and Chandalika have been envisioned by men living in a patriarchal society, yet they are presented as seeking a space for themselves, even by defying the law of the land. Tagore, a subject in colonial India, unfailingly asserted his conviction that widespread social and religious reform was necessary as a precursor to political independence, for the establishment of a truly 'free' and democratic society. Through this dance-drama, Tagore exhorts the educated upper classes to throw off their age-old prejudices and raise up the underprivileged sections of society—yet even after six decades of Independence, his dream remains unrealised. However, it may serve as an eye-opener to all societies: unless the majority community becomes aware of the deep feelings of alienation it engenders, through a regular, inexorable persecution of the minority community, it will always exist on the brink of a dormant volcano of its own making. ■

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 All quotations of the text are from Aeschylus, *Agamemnon,* Penguin Books, UK, 1977.
2 *Agamemnon,* p. 90.
3 Ibid., p. 92.
4 Ibid., p. 95.
5 All quotations of the text are from *King Lear*, (ed,) Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare, London, 1987.
6 *King Lear*, Appendices, p. 227.
7 Tagore, R., "Chandalika", *Gitabitan,* Calcutta, 2002, p. 587. All quotations from the original Bengali have been translated by me.
8 Ibid., p. 589.
9 Ibid., p. 591.

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* Dr Sona Roy is a retired Professor in English, Calcutta University, and currently Guest Faculty, Department of English, Presidency College, Kolkata.

Ecological Renditions in the Scriptures of Hinduism – II

SAMTA P. PANDYA

The Upanishads extol ecosophies through metaphysical discourses on Brahman (cosmos) and primordial matter (*Prakriti*). There are eighteen principal Upanishads and several minor Upanishads (or neo-Upanishads) expressing a unitarian ecological consciousness in multitude ways[3]. The eighteen principal Upanishads are: *Kathopanishad*, *Kenopanishad*, *Chāndogya Upanishad*, *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, *Prashna Upanishad*, *Mundaka Upanishad*, *Ishā Upanishad*, *Māndukya Upanishad*, *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*, *Aitareya Upanishad*, *Kaushitaki Brāhmana Upanishad*, *Maitri Upanishad*, *Bāshkalamantropanishad*, *Chāgaleyopanishad*, *Ārsheyopanishad*, *Saunakopanishad* and *Jaimini Upanishad* (Limaye and Wadekar, 1931). Existing literature discerning ecotheological references in the Upanishads concentrates primarily on these principal texts.

Existing literature has dealt with an analysis of references in the Upanishads pertaining to cosmology and primal elements. In examining Upanishadic cosmology, Lalye (1995) has looked at references in the *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad* of an undifferentiated unity from which air, fire and other elements are created; and references in the *Chāndogya Upanishad* of identifying these primal constituents in a mystical manner. Mande (1995), while explaining the cosmology and cosmogony of the principal Upanishads, has explained the philosophic viewpoint (the notion of the universe originated from a supreme being) and the materialistic viewpoint (the five primal elements are the root cause of origin)[4]. Bhise (1995) has dealt with water element in Vedic cosmogony, waters being the primordial substance containing the emergent world together with the energy necessary for emergent activity[5]. Ghataye (1995) and Lal (1995) have examined quotations in the Upanishads in connection with the *Mahābhutas* (primal elements) establishing parallels to ideas of Thales and Anaximander who considered the primary substances to be infinite or indeterminate—calling them 'aperion'. Dharmadhikary (1995) has looked at the importance of and veneration to the earth element in the *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Prashna* and *Chāndogya* Upanishads. Sharma (2000) has examined the sources in the *Brihadāranyaka* and *Chāndogya* of the divinity element in nature.

Studies of a comparative nature and those with application components include those by Madabhushi (1995) who has looked at comparison of the cosmology in the Upanishads with modern cosmological ideas. According to the study, most of the modern theories of cosmology assume the original existence of a rotating hot gaseous nebula, but is silent on how this came into being and what motivated such rotation. These answers can be found in the Upanishads that consider the Absolute as the originating source of the universe, thereby

elaborating an ecotheological stance. In the applicative strand, Murthy (1997) has examined the Upanishads for discourses on the earth and earth-related phenomena. References are made to the *Taittiriya Upanishad* tracing the evolution of the earth from space and to the *Chāndogya Upanishad* for applications such as the concept of divine earth to geological data.

Thus the descriptive, comparative and applied works on ecological consciousness as expressed in the Upanishads display a fragmented treatment of the available material. A first-hand examination of the core contents of various Upanishads reveal certain unitary dimensions of ecocentrism running through all the Upanishadic texts such as references of the ecotheological Absolute as instrumental in creation and propositions of a divine cosmology.

The *Kathopanishad* (belonging to the Krishna Yajurveda) claims all sentient and non-sentient beings to be representing the macrocosmic soul (Brahman), thus exhorting for their equality[6] (Sharvananda, 1962). The *Kenopanishad* mentions the unity of the being with the absolute consciousness (Brahman) as the essence of ecological consciousness and regards all existential forms as Brahman, thereby providing spiritual connotations to all beings[7] (Sharvananda, 1960). The *Chāndogya Upanishad* adopts the stance parallel to that of Sartre in that it shows that there is only one Self in all beings[8] (Jha, 1942). The *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* (as a part of the Shatapatha Brāhmana available in the Mādhyandina and Kanva recensions) also contains elaborate descriptions of the veneration of the cosmic force. It adopts an epistemological holism (where there exists a unity of the knower and the knowable, thus proposing an underlying unification between the self and the cosmos)[9]. The central essence of the *Prashna Upanishad* (based on the 'Prashna Sukta' of the *Atharvaveda*) is the veneration of the *prāna* or life energy and the establishment of the divine as the instrumental and material cause in creation of the universe[10] (Dave, 1989). The second chapter of the *Mundaka Upanishad* (belonging to the Shaunakiya Shākhā of the *Atharvaveda*) contains notions of the Akshara Brahman–*Akshara* meaning that which pervades all transformations from subtle to gross elements (Dave, 1989) thereby providing space for divine cosmologies. The *Ishā Upanishad* contains hymns of worshipping nature (differentiated into created gross elements). In the *Māndukya Upanishad*, the mode of worshipping the Brahman has been stated through the syllable *Aum* in the twelfth hymn (Limaye and Wadekar, 1931).

In the fifth *anuvāka* of the '*shikshā valli*' of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the importance of worship of the earth and atmosphere (*Bhur* and *Bhuvar*) has been stated (Roer, 1932). In the *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad* of the Krishna Yajurveda there is a reconciliation of the doctrines of the unity of Self, Brahman and the dualism embedded in the subtle and gross elements theory pertaining to Primordial Nature. Evolution is explained through Adornian negative dialectics (negating the limits of the Absolute: Daftary, 1958) and the interconnectedness of all subtle and gross elements represent holistic ecological ethics, eventually propagating the oneness of Primordial Nature–*Prakriti* (Hume, 1986)[11].

The *Aitareyopanishad* of the *Rigveda* venerates the life energy—the spirit immanent in the universe. *Prāna* is identified with *Brihati* and extolled as the all-pervading guardian who sustains the entire spacial realm including sentient and non-sentient beings. The main purpose of the Upanishad is to provide knowledge of primal substances, cosmic consciousness and gross elements (Sharvananda, 1955). Similar discourses are found in the *Kaushitaki Brāhmana Upanishad* wherein, along with life energy,

there exist instances of worship of sun, moon, lightning, thunder cloud, wind, ether, fire and water[12] (Radhakrishnan, 1962). The *Maitri Upanishad* localises the spirit of the world in the sun[13] (Hume, 1986) supporting thereby tenets of natural theology. Among the other principal Upanishads, the *Bāshkalamantropanishad*, *Chāgaleyopanishad*, *Ārsheyopanishad*, *Shaunakopanishad* and *Jaimini Upanishad* contain discussions on the nature of cosmos and the importance of cosmocentric ethics[14] (Limaye and Wadekar, 1931).

References in the minor Upanishads and neo-Upanishadic philosophy

Classified on the basis of length and chronology, the minor Upanishads or neo-Upanishads (a virgin area in terms of existing secondary literature) also contain ideas on cosmology and implications for ecocentric ethics (Gajendragadkar, 1959). Neo-Upanishadic philosophy is paralleled to Neo-Platonism with predominant interest in pragmatic epistemology and axiology (Mahadevan, 1999). Of the minor Upanishads containing discourses on cosmology, twenty-four minor Upanishads classified as Sāmānya Vedānta Upanishads deal with the general Upanishadic doctrines on cosmology, primal substances, primordial nature and gross and subtle elements. Of these, the *Akshi Upanishad* deals with the veneration of the sun-god, *Adhyātma Upanishad* with cosmology and creation, *Annapurnā* and *Ātmā* Upanishads with the existential world and phenomena of nature and the *Nirālambana Upanishad* deals with description of the cosmos, various nature divinities and celestials. The *Prānāgnihotra Upanishad* describes the life energy as Brahman and veneration of the same and the *Mantrika Upanishad* describes and venerates various phenomena of nature (Mahadevan, 1999).

The *Subālā Upanishad* deals with the description of creation and various beings in the world. The *Surya Upanishad* of the *Atharvaveda*, as the name suggests, describes sun-god as Brahman and propagates veneration of the same. The *Kaivalya Upanishad,* along Purānic lines, deals with, deification of the cosmos (Deussen, 1985). The *Pancabrahma*, *Paingala* and the *Vajrasucika* Upanishads deal with veneration of the *Pancamahābhutas* or the five basic elements—earth, fire, water, air and ether (Mahadevan, 1999). Another significant aspect is that of symbologies and iconographies incorporating the elemental cosmic contingencies of form (like the circle representing the light and square indicating water). An example of this is the *Vāstusutra Upanishad* (signifying a move from metaphysics and mystical theology to a comprehension of cosmology along pragmatic lines)[15] (Sarma, Bauer and Baumer, 1982).

Philosophical schools and ecological consciousness

The consolidation of the doctrines expressed in Vedic literature and the Upanishads is found in the treatises of various schools of Indian philosophy (Radhakrishnan, 1957), some of the readings of which reveal ecological consciousness (Parthasarathy, 1995). The nuances of the schools under discussion are those of Nyāya, Vaisheshika, Sānkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimānsa and Vedānta. Although being distinctively different areas of analysis, these systems display various epistemological levels in their treatment of common dimensions such as primal elements and substances. Existing secondary literature in this area deals with the ecological implications of certain subtle fragmented nuances embedded within the Nyāya, Vaisheshika, Sānkhya and Vedanta schools. They assist the analysis of various ecosophies through an investigation of cosmologies and discussion of primal elements along the lines of

Anaximander, Thales and Spinoza.

The Nyāya school has been compared to the dialectics of the Aristotelian school (Colebrooke, 1977). Contrary to the traditional schools of logic (Western logic), the epistemological variations within the Nyāya school, through a series of propositions and syllogisms, aim to arrive at a consciousness of existential nature, similar to tenets of ecocentrism (Randle, 1976). This dimension also emerges in a study on cosmology by Mukhopadhyay (1995) who looked at the *Tattvacintāmani* text of Gangeshopādhyāy of the Nyāya school propagating that creation presupposes existence of primordial stuff or matter which is divine and which cannot be structurally, conceptually or physically broken into simple units of matter.

The Vaisheshika school (parallels found in the philosophy of the Greek philosopher Democritus) discusses primal substances, matter and atoms. Reality consists of substances that possess qualities. Substances are substrates of qualities but are distinct from qualities they possess. The Vaisheshika *sutra* enumerates the substances (Book I chapter 1), defines attributes of primal substances (Book II chapter 1) and also defines and explains the various phenomena of nature. Another Vaisheshika text *Padārthadharmasangraha* defines various attributes of primal substances (chapter III 20-25) and the creation of gross natural elements from primal substances (Radhakrishnan, 1957); (Max Mueller, 1973). Combining the aforementioned two systems, Lalye (1995) has looked at the Nyāya-Vaisheshika system (particularly the text—*Siddhānta Muktāvali*) taking into account God as the efficient cause who keeps order in nature along with discussions on the traditional five elements, their level of experience and the correspondence with modern physics.

The Sānkhya school, (parallels found in Pythagorean philosophy (Colebrooke, 1977)) is known for the theory of evolution. *Prakriti* or primal matter is the basis of all existence. As the changing object, *Prakriti* is the source of the world of becoming. In it all determinate matter is implicitly contained. The third section of the *Sānkhyakārikā* describes the primal nature as the root matter. The *Sānkhya Pravacana Sutra* maintains that *Prakriti* is the state of quiescence (equilibrium), the disequilibrium of which is responsible for the evolution of five *tanmātras* and the gross elements, thereby displaying holistic ecological ethics in the process of evolution (Pereira, 1976). Examining the ecological implications of the Sānkhya doctrines, Rege (1995) propagates that it presupposes a basic ontological division between minds, which are characterised by consciousness, and material things, which are characterised by extension and motion; the ultimate constituents of all entities being *Prakriti* (nature), *guna* (attributes) or a substantive entity.

The Yoga school contains a pragmatic epistemology (Desai, 1972; Max Mueller, 1973) which through its doctrine of unification of the consciousness reveals an embedded ecological consciousness (Patil, 1975). The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali contain references on *Prakriti*, revealing that the basis of *Prakriti* is *chitta*, the common existential element in all beings (Rocher, 1988). The Purva Mimānsa *sutras* contain theological treatises describing modes of animistic forms of worship and veneration of nature's forces (Max Mueller, 1973). In the Mimānsā *sutras* of Jaimini, there are *sutras* describing the modes of worshipping rain, rain-God—Indra and the Gārhapatya fire (symbolised as cosmic energy). There also exist *sutras* providing metaphysical connotation to grass and *sutras* dealing with the subject that for veneration of nature deities, grass is an integral component; along with *sutras* dealing with animal worship[16].

The Vedanta school consists of different

interpretations of the Upanishads and the *Brahmasutra* providing multiple theses on Brahman, the substratum of the microcosm and macrocosm of the universe[17] (Parthasarathy, 1978). Bertocci (1985) finds parallels of Vedanta in Greek philosophy particularly Aristotle's ontology (primal substances as prime movers of the world) and Plato's three independent and co-eternal metaphysical ultimates–demi urge, eternal form and receptacle; the interaction between which produces a world of time and space. There are also parallels to the normative implications of Gestalt's principle of organic wholeness (the basis of ecocentrism) variously manifesting themselves as configurations and form a totality (Minakshi Sundaram, 1985).

The variations within the Vedanta school provide multiple worldviews ranging from cosmocentrism to ecocentrism displaying various shades of ecological ethics through spiritual cosmologies. The discourses also contain the relationship of the individual soul in existential beings to the cosmic soul, the unity or duality between which form crucial points of departure (Gandhi, 1970). The Vishishtādvaitic stance of Rāmānuja states that the cosmos is an adjectival determination of the Absolute and hence possesses divine connotations (Thibaut, 1962; Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 1961). The Vallabhite interpretation is known as the Shuddhadvaita or pure non-dualism. The stance is that the relationship between the Absolute and the world is that of the relation between the whole and the part and thus the cosmos is divine (Date, 1973; Max Mueller, 1973). The Dvaitādvaita stance of Nimbārka maintains that the relation between the Absolute and the cosmos is that of independence and dependence–cosmos is a subordinate existential reality of the Absolute. Duality is thus different as well as non-different from the non-dual independent reality; different as possessing a dependent subordinate existence and non-different as possessing no independent existence; each 'being' representing an existential counterpart of the spiritual being (Gandhi, 1970; Colebrooke, 1977). Madhvācārya's stance is that of Dvaita–the Absolute and cosmos/world/phenomenal world are different, the Absolute being the instrumental precipitating factor thereby providing for a spiritual cosmology. The *Avibhāgalakshana* of Vijnānabhikshu proposes a non-duality of empirical reality that appears as a differentiated plurality in its manifest form. The example cited is that of *Prakriti* or primordial matter in its transcendental form as a non-dual basis of the differentiated world of experience. Non-duality (Brahman) in the transcendental state also translates to non-duality in the meta-empirical state, thus providing a basis for holistic ecological ethics or ecocentrism (Van Buitenen, 1971).

The critical hermeneutics of Shankara's thesis of Advaita forwards that the Absolute along with the phenomenal consciousness create the cosmos, which is divine and not differentiated from the Absolute. All existential beings form the Absolute (Brahman). Brahman is the material cause and, through the instrumentality of the phenomenal consciousness, evolution takes place–thus providing for a divine cosmology. Brahman is thus considered the material and efficient cause of empirical reality. The commentators on the *Shankarabhāshya* of the *Brahmasutra* (Vācaspati Mishra, Vignarāja and Bhāskara) propose that Advaita envelops the transformation of Brahman into meta-empirical reality postulating both difference and non-difference as the essential relation between Absolute and the phenomenal world. The finite world is regarded as an integral expression of the Absolute, thereby providing a basic framework for ecocentrism and mystical ecotheology (Radhakrishnan, 1923; Thibaut, 1962; Gupta, 1976;

Chattopadhyaya, 1978; Comaer, 2000).

Among the refutations to this trend of thought, Nelson (2000) forwards that Advaita presupposes a wholesale objectification and radical ontological devaluation by its thesis of transcendental dualism that is world negating. Drawing from Vedantic emanationist theory that everything in the world has spiritual worth, Sharma (2000) and Deutsch (2000) have examined the issue of irrelevance of nature as seen by certain interpreters in the Advaitic tradition. To support the ecotheogical stance of Advaita philosophy, they have drawn on works of Hiriyana (1949) talking of Advaitic ecological thinking based on 'dependent co-origination' meaning that the self cannot be explained independently of the Brahman; the counter perspective of Osborne (1971) that the arguments of Advaita are in reality a reverence for nature; the stand of Rambachan (1989) supporting the Advaita stance denoting the value of the world as the mystery of God and Singh (1993) who has discussed principles of Vedanta which provide the framework for an ecosophy, the premier ones being those of the Brahman residing within each individual's consciousness and the notion of a shared spirituality of all beings. Thus the various philosophical schools provide for an ecosophical framework amalgamating diverse postulates. ■

(To be concluded)

NOTES

3 According to Ghosh (1971) the ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in the thoughts of Plato and Pythagoras (Neoplatonism and Gnosticism).

4 The philosophic viewpoint is cited in the *Taittiriya* (III-1), *Aitareya* (I-1-1), *Chāndogya* (VI-3-2), *Prashna* (III-3) and *Mundaka* (II-1-3) Upanishads and the materialistic viewpoint is cited in the *Chāndogya* (III-19-1-3), *Prashna* (II-2) *Brihadāranyaka* (III 7-14) and *Taittiriya* (II-1) Upanishads.

5 References have been drawn from *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* (1-2-1; 2-1-8; 2-5-2), *Kaushitaki Upanishad* (4-2) dealing with energy residing in waters and *Chāndogya Upanishad* (7-10-1) dealing with waters equated to the Brahman.

6 The shloka in the *Kathopanishad* discussing the macrocosmic and microcosmic aspects of Brahman is (Chapter) IV-(shloka) 6. *Kathopanishad* also discusses that the relation between Brahman and the universe is similar to the form of the object and its atomic constituents in V-13. There is also a manifestation of Brahman as equated to cosmic manifestation in VI-1 and VI-2.

7 The *Kenopanishad* maintains that in notions of Brahman, subjective knowledge and objective experiences vanish. Both subject and object are considered polarities of a unitary being. All existential forms are regarded as Brahman.

8 Particularly the sixth chapter in the *Chāndogya Upanishad* deals with the philosophy of being and Brahman. The relevant references are in 6.i.4; 6.ii.1; 6.ii.3; 6.iii.2; 6.iii.3; 6.iv.4. Other relevant quotations from the *Chāndogya Upanishad* cite the following: The earth is the essence of all beings, water is the essence of earth, herbs are the essence of water, and man is the essence of herbs *udgitha*—essence of life. In I-3-2 and I-3-3, life breath is equated to the energy of the sun. In II-2-1 veneration of the five *mahābhutas* has been mentioned. In II-3-1 has been mentioned the meditation upon the fivefold *sama* with reference to rain, the preceding high wind is the syllable '*aum*', the appearance of the cloud is the *prastāva*, the raining is the *udgitha*, the thunder and lightning are the *pratihāra*. Similarly in II-4-1 there is a mention of veneration of

waters. In II-5-1 there is a reference of veneration of seasons, in II-6-1 reference to veneration of animals and in II-9-(1-8) reference to venerating the sun. In II-14-1 it is stated that the rising sun is the syllable '*aum*', the risen Sun is the *prastāva*, midday sun is the *udgitha*, the post meridian sun is the *pratihāra* and the setting sun is the *nidhāna*. Mention of cosmic deities is found in II-15-1, II-16-1, II-18-1, II-20-1, II-21-1. In III-1 the sun is explained to contain the vital solar energy and in III-13-7 there is an elaboration of Brahman. In the *Chāndogya Upanishad* there is also a mention of equating nature's forces, the sun and bhutas to Brahman considering their vital roles in the cosmic drama. V-11-1, V-15-1, V-16-1 and V-17-1 mention the worship of the five bhutas and that none of them can be regarded as isolated entities. The eighth discourse contains an investigation into the nature of Brahman.

9 In describing the cosmic fire the *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* describes the sum total of the subtle bodies in the universe as Hiranyagarbha and the sum total of the gross bodies as Viraj. The main focus of the Upanishad is on the self-Brahman relations by resorting to pragmatic explanations and metaphorically equating the entire relation to that of being and Primordial Nature. In I-5-12 and I-5-13 the sun and water are equated to the vital force. II-3-1 and II-3-2 describe the gross and the subtle forms of the cosmos. There is also a mention of the cosmic force as the common source of all beings in Brh. U. II-5-1. Brh. U. also contains important descriptions of Brahman as the common self in all beings (III-3-2; III-4-1). The components in V-14-3 and VI-4-1 mention veneration of the bhutas and solar energy.

10 The second chapter in the *Prashna Upanishad* mentions the veneration of the life-energy. Concept of veneration of life-energy is also found (as seen) in the *Chāndogya Upanishad* (II-5) where *Prāna* is the ultimate substratum of everything; IV-3-3 where *Prāna* is *samvarga* and compared with vāyu in the macrocosm; and VII-15-1 where *Prāna* is the centre of everything. In the *Kaushitaki Brāhmana*, *Prāna* is considered as *Āyuh*.

11 *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*, Brahmānda Valli 1-7 anuvāka.

12 In the *Kaushitaki Brāhmana Upanishad*, life-energy is equated with Brahman in (2-1); in (2-6) the importance of sun worship has been mentioned and there is also an elaborate description of the veneration of the life-energy (3-2).

13 In the *Maitri Upanishad*, the inner soul is identified with the soul in the space, which is localised in the sun and the light of the sun as the form of Brahman is represented by the mystic syllable *Aum*. Ref: 6-2, 6-3, 6-4.

14 The important references in the *Bāshkalamantropanishad* (part of Bāshkalasamhitā of the Rigveda) are: Shlokas 12, 17, 23. The *Ārsheyopanishad* accommodates a discussion on Brahman and primordial matter of which the shlokas 1 and 2 are relevant. In the *Shaunakopanishad* the shlokas 1 and 4 are relevant. In the *Jaimini Upanishad* the following quotations are relevant: (I-1-1); (I-2-1); (I-2-2); (4-27); (4-28).

15 In the *Vāstusutra Upanishad*, Ch. 2 Sutra 11 states that: 'following the order of Prajāpati, the circle represents light (*tejas*) while the square indicates water'. The diagonals in form indicate the nature of wind-*karnadvayam*. (2-12). The *sthāpakas* trace the rhombus as the earth-*dhārena* (2-13). Their convergence is symbolised as indicating the lifebreath (2-14). In form, the vertical lines have the nature of wind, horizontal lines have the nature of water and diagonal lines have the nature of wind (Māruta) (2-21).

16 The *sutras* providing metaphysical connotation to grass are Pada 7 Adhikarana I Sutras 1-5. The relevant quotations of the Jaimini Mimānsā Sutras are in Chapter 4, Pāda 1, Adhikarana V, Sutras 11-16.

17 Vedanta texts primarily provide commentaries and interpretations of *Brahmasutras* of Bādarāyana containing the essence of all major Upanishads. (Radhakrishnan, 1960) The *Brahmasutras* contain discourses denoting the world as Brahman. Some important Sutras on Brahman (cosmos) primordial matter and evolution are cited in I.i.1-3 and I.i. 22-23, 40.

Many facets of Vedanta

Aspects of Vedanta. Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. First Reprint. 2009. pp. 414. Rs 130.

Aspects of Vedanta is, as it were, pearls strung together with a golden thread. Each article of this book is a well-cut gem. They are gloriously set upon the Vedanta philosophy which is unique. Even Buddhism, that ostensibly denies the authority of the Vedas and superficially differs from Vedanta, fits in so well here. Such an anthology comprising topical renderings on contentious metaphysical issues by erudite scholars is undoubtedly interesting; more so, because in this handy publication scholarship and lucidity have been blended well to explicate numerous intricacies of Vedanta by its contributors.

The Vedas are impersonal and eternal. They are not idiosyncratic. They are rather repositories of revealed esoteric truths—truths realized by the sages, carefully preserved in memory, and handed down from generation to generation since the earliest period of Indian civilization. Distinctly divided into 'work' and 'knowledge' portions, they offer the whole gamut of human experience. The work portion contains instructions regarding sacrifices, and the knowledge portion the wisdom of Brahman, the Absolute. The knowledge portion, otherwise known as the Upanishads, is technically termed Vedanta, being the essence the Vedas want to propound finally. In a word, the Vedas are a testimony to the superb intellectual and spiritual development of the Indian race from time immemorial, and the inclusive thoughts based on the Vedanta a consummation of Indian Philosophy.

The '*Nāsadiya Sukta*' of the *Rig Veda*, some say, is the origin of the Vedantic ideas. So, the Upanishads are presumed to be the gradual manifestations of thoughts potentially present in the Vedic *suktas*. They prove that Indians were extraordinarily bold thinkers with keen observation and spiritual urge. Indians relentlessly endeavoured to understand the mysteries of the temporal phenomena, and thereby maintained a continuous search after the transcendental Reality or the ultimate cause behind the microcosm as well as the macrocosm. To them, nothing was sacrilegious if it was a sincere speculation regarding the Truth. That is why, the practices, however contradictory to Vedic religion, also found expressions in the Vedas themselves. Hence, the views of the hard core materialists like the *Chārvākas* were also honoured as a valid philosophy.

Vedanta harbours the germs of all knowledge concerning human existence. Each individual view to it is a stepping-stone on the path to its highest stage. It does not seek any imaginary or hypothetical explanation of anything observable. Its findings are verifiable and positive. Its philosophy makes an in-depth inquiry into truth and the truth it reveals is not subject to modification with the passage of time and progress of science. It is practically relevant in all times to all peoples. The veracity of this was once again demonstrated recently by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. V. Subrahmanya Iyer says in his article 'Essentials of Vedanta': 'It was left to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda to present Vedanta in a manner suited to the modern mind. They have shown that Vedanta includes and implies all stages and varieties of human experience and knowledge, and that it is not opposed to the latest developments of science and philosophy.' (p. 37)

The Upanishads, the *Bhagavad-Gitā* and the *Brahma Sutras* are the principal texts of Vedanta, on which commentaries were required to be given for any view to be accepted and established as an orthodox

philosophy. *Bhāgavat Purāna* was, nevertheless, held in high esteem because of its kindred essence.

Polemics resorting to these scriptural sources lent shapes to various systems. It is learnt from the '*Brahmajal Sutra*' that there were as many as sixty-two schools of philosophical thought during the time of Buddha. Later, their number perhaps went considerably down and found expression in a few well-known systems such as *Advaitavāda, Vishishtādvaitavāda, Dvaitavāda, Vedāvedavāda*, and *Vishuddhādvaitavāda*. In the opinion of Swami Vivekananda, the Vedanta philosophy 'really comprises all the various sects that now exist in India' and its various interpretations progressed, 'beginning with the dualistic or Dvaita and ending with the non-dualistic or Advaita'.

The greatest historically known exponents of these systems are Shankarāchārya, Rāmānujāchārya, Madhvāchārya, Nimbārkāchārya, and Ballabhāchārya respectively. Besides, there are also sizeable followings of the *Vaishnava* and *Pashupata* systems which some way or other intrinsically resemble the alluded ones. The *Achintya-vedāvedavāda* school of Sri Chaitanya was able to carve out a distinctive position for the novelty its logic and arguments presented.

The points on which all the systems broadly agree are: Brahman is the root cause of the Universe; *moksha* is achieved by the knowledge of Brahman alone; and Brahman is known through the study of the scriptures only. But they differ on matters regarding the true nature of Brahman, the kind of relationship between Brahman and the universe, the relationship between an individual self and Brahman and the condition of individual self in its absolutely liberated state (*moksha*).

According to *Advaitavāda*, Brahman is without quality (*nirguna*), without form (*nirākāra*), eternal (*shāshvata*), pure consciousness (*shuddha chaitanya*). *Ishvara* is the greatest conceivable form of Brahman created by *māyā*, *jagat* the *māyā*–created *vivarta* (apparent manifestation) of Brahman having no real existence. *Jiva* in reality is non-different from Brahman. In the view of *Vishishtādvaitavāda*, Brahman is a Personal God with infinite auspicious qualities; *jagat* is real and created out of Brahman, *jiva* part of Brahman with the quality of agent and finite. It holds that *jiva* and *jagat* constitute the body of Brahman. According to *Dvaitavāda*, *jiva* and *jagat* are separate from and independent of, but controlled by Brahman. *Bhedābhedavāda* though unites *jiva*, *jagat* and Brahman, yet sentient and insentient *jagat* is both different as well as non-different from Brahman. It, however, takes *jiva* and *jagat* as non-different from Brahman. Brahman is whole and they are its parts. All the schools agree that Brahman is the controller (*niyāmaka*) of the phenomenal world though they differ on whether or not it is the material cause (*upādāna kārana*) of the phenomenal world. In the case of *Advaita*, Brahman is the efficient (*nimitta*) as well as the material (*upādāna*) cause. Therefore its change into the phenomenal world is not real. There are others who think Brahman is the efficient cause only and not the material cause, hence the phenomenal world is real as well. Again, there are others still who look upon the phenomenal world as real transformation (*parināma*) of Brahman. Accordingly, it is also real like Brahman though its part.

All, other than the Advaitists, hold that 'egoity' of pure individual self persists even in the state of *moksha*. In other words, absolute liberation does not mean annihilation of 'egoity' to them. On the other hand, Advaitists hold that pure individual self is absolute consciousness and is really one with Brahman. In their view, 'egoity' is destroyed but the self that survives gets transfigured into Brahman in *moksha*. Therefore, 'what is destroyed is not the essence of the ego which is the self, but the ego-consciousness as

something distinct from Brahman'.

Māyā is the root of the manifested world of names and forms (*nāma-rupa*). It is shorn of self-identity yet undeniable, therefore an indeterminable entity. It is nescience (*avidyā*) and beginningless (*anādi*). *Ishvara* is the controller of *māyā*. He is immanent as its wielder. *Jiva* is controlled by *māyā*. It becomes oblivious of its identity with Brahman because of the influence of *māyā*. This is the contention of *Advaitavāda*.

Achintyabhedābhedavāda believes that the Upanishads support difference (*bheda*) as well as non-difference (*abheda*) between *jiva* (individual self) and Brahman. It seeks their reconciliation, both being indispensable to it. It holds, since the Upanishads speak of *bheda*, *bheda* should be recognized. But then, this *bheda* is apparent, not real—'otherwise, the Upanishads would not have spoken of Brahman as being One without a second'. *Achintyabhedābhedavāda* has been able to maintain its typical identity by its *Krishnatattva*. Sri Krishna is *saguna* as well as *nirguna*. He is the consummation of beauty, sweetness and bliss, hence the Supreme Attractor. He is transcendental *Rasa* and *rasika* simultaneously. He is *Parama* Brahman. An exclusive loving service to Krishna as the nearest and the dearest one breaks all bonds of *māyā*. It is, as if, greater than the fourth *purushārtha* or *moksha*.

Buddhism was the product of the *jnāna mārga* of the Upanishads. The intense practice of discrimination between the Real and the unreal was the basis of its early form. So, meditation crept in it and became its core. Buddha's attitude of silence regarding the highest Truth could be construed as his interpretation of Brahman as *Shāntam* declared in the Upanishad. Like the Vedantins, he considered *avidyā* the root cause of *samsāra*, and desire the driving force to suffering. In the case of *moksha*, Buddhism, however, denies that Self-knowledge is an effective means, for, to it, the Self remaining existent, the idea of 'I' and 'mine' could never be removed. But, on analysis, it is discernible that Buddhism echoes only the same concept of *jivatva* of Advaita Vedanta that denies the existence of *jiva* altogether by its concept of *Anātmavāda*. According to one of its schools of thought, when the idea of 'I' and 'mine' extinguishes both internally and externally in deep contemplation of the *shunyatā* (void), all the *upādānas* such as desire, wrong perception etc., also vanish for good, leading to cessation of birth. Thus *kāmas* and passions being extinct, *moksha* is being obtained. Gaudapāda makes it clear that *Vijnānavāda* of Buddhism is nothing but *Brahmavāda* or *Atmavāda* of Vedanta in disguise. With this in mind, Swami Vivekananda declared Buddhism as the 'rebel child of Hinduism'. Not only that, he even proclaimed it as 'fulfilment of Hinduism' for its exposition of the Vedantic truth in an uncharted path. Therefore, it is not perhaps correct to assume that Buddhism has disappeared from India. As Satkari Mookerjee says in his paper 'Buddhism in Indian Life and Thought': 'But it will be mistake to suppose that Buddhism as a spiritual force is extinct in the land of its genesis. It lives for certain, but in a form totally assimilated to Hinduism, so that it is not easily discernible to a casual observer.'

The book is a collection of the different 'Aspects of Vedanta' in the true sense. Providing Swami Vivekananda's famous lecture 'The Vedanta Philosophy' in the Preface, it makes a right beginning. It holds out the salient features and many others like ethical, moral and spiritual matters elaborately in an organic fashion, working out an overview of Vedanta. There are sixteen more writings following it, ending with one on Swamiji's view on Advaita Vedanta. They are spanning over the entire scope of Vedantic thoughts and ideas, and each scholar is able to bring out its epitome in that aspect he deals with. ■

SWAMI SANDARSHANANANDA

CALENDAR FOR APRIL 2011

	5.15	p.m.	Devotional Songs : In the Shrine from 5.15 p.m. to 6.15 p.m. every working day
1	6.00	"	*Bhagavat Katha* (Bengali) : Swami Jushtananda
2	4.15	"	Vivekananda Anushilan (for enrolled youth members only)
	6.00	"	*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanger Antarange* (Bengali) : Swami Satyarupananda / Swami Swatantrananda
4	6.15	"	*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* (Bengali) : Swami Ritananda
5	6.00	"	*Prevention of Accidents : Various Measures* : Sailendra Kumar Mukherjee / Samar Kumar Bagchi
6	6.15	"	*Sri Sri Mayer Katha* (Bengali) : Swami Somatmananda
7	5.30	"	*Panchadashi* (Bengali) : Sitanath Goswami
8	6.00	"	*Kena Upanishad* (English) : Swami Atmapriyananda
9	4.30	"	Vivek-Vikash (Personality Development) (for enrolled youth members only)
	6.00	"	*Vartaman Yuge Swamijir Vedanta Chintar Prayojaniyata* (Bengali) : Swami Sarvapriyananda / Swami Ritananda
11	5.30	"	*Mahamahopadhyaya Yogendranath—Alokesamanya Pratibha* (Bengali) : Sitanath Goswami / Minati Kar
12	6.00	"	*Gita* (Bengali) : Swami Vedaswarupananda
13	6.15	"	*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Bengali) : Swami Sarvabhutananda
18	5.30	"	*Bhagavad-Gita* (Sanskrit) : Sitanath Goswami
	6.30	"	Vivekananda Science Circle : *New View of Our Solar System* : Debiprasad Duari
19	5.30	"	Symposium (in English, Bengali and Hindi) : *Sri Ramakrishna's Monastic Disciples* Opening Song : Swami Shubhakarananda Participants : Swami Somatmananda, Swami Devapriyananda, Swami Shubhakarananda, Swami Vimohananda President : Swami Sarvabhutananda
20	6.15	"	*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Bengali) : Swami Sarvabhutananda
21	6.00	"	Cultural Programme (in collaboration with Bhavna Records & Cassettes) : *Surer Bandhane : Bishnupur—Jorasanko* : Santanu Bandyopadhyay and Manoj Murali Nair (Admission by ticket)
23	4.30	"	Vivek-Vikash (Personality Development) (for enrolled youth members only)
	6.00	"	*Pratyahik Jivane Ishwarlabher Upaya* (Bengali) : Swami Jnanaprakashananda
25	6.15	"	*Katha Upanishad* (English) : Swami Sarvabhutananda
26	6.00	"	*Kashmir Saivism* (English) : Debabrata Sen Sharma
28	6.00	"	*Yuganayak Vivekananda* (Bengali) : Swami Chidrupananda
29	6.00	"	*Adhyatma Ramayana* (Sanskrit) : Swami Tattwavidananda
30	4.45	"	Vivekananda Study Circle (Junior) : Children's Own Story Hour Session
	6.00	"	*Prasthanabheda* (Bengali) : Samiran Chandra Chakraborty

Posted on 2 Apr. 2011

(*Continued from second cover*)
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All correspondence to be addressed to :

Swami Sarvabhutananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029
Telephone : (91-33-) 2464-1303 (3 lines)
2465-2531 (2 lines)
2466-1235 (3 lines)
Fax : (91-33-) 2464-1307
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